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# THE WILDERNESS

## A Comedy in Three Acts

BY

H. V. ESMOND

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# CHARACTERS.

*Produced at the St. James's Theatre, London, 11th April, 1901.*

| | |
|---|---|
| Sir Harry Milanor | Mr. George Alexander. |
| Lady Milanor, *his mother* | Miss Le Thiere. |
| Ethel Glyndon, *his cousin* | Miss Dora Barton. |
| Joseph Trevor, *his uncle* | Mr. H. H. Vincent. |
| The Hon. Jack Kennerly | Mr. W. Grahame Browne. |
| Lady Honoria Pawson | Mrs. Edward Saker. |
| Mr. Gilbert Pawson, *her son* | Mr. Lennox Pawle. |
| Mrs. Buckley Weston | Miss M. Talbot. |
| Mabel, *her daughter* | Miss Eva Moore. |
| Grinstead Worburn, *a rich brewer* | Mr. Edward Arthur. |
| Hugh Graeme | Mr. C. Aubrey Smith. |
| Edith Cadogan | Miss Julie Opp. |
| Harold } *Mrs. Buckley Weston's twins.* | Master Vyvian Thomas. |
| Marjorie } | Miss Phyllis Dare. |
| Miss Anstruther, *Ethel's aunt* | Miss Henrietta Cowen. |

ACT I.—THE NIGHT.

The Scene of Act I. is a fashionable afternoon tea-room in Bond Street.

ACT II.—THE DARK HOUR BEFORE THE DAWN.

The Scene of Act II. is a lonely spot in the Borcambe woods.

ACT III.—THE DAY.

The Scene of Act III. is the drawing-room in Sir Harry Milanor's house, Chesterfield Street, Mayfair.

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# THE WILDERNESS.

## ACT I.

### THE NIGHT.

SCENE.—*Fashionable tea-rooms in Bond Street. A large room at back opening on to balcony, overlooking the street. Near the centre of the stage an arch, and the lower tea-room, in the front. Tea-tables everywhere. A band somewhere at the back playing at intervals during the Act. The maids are smart, lady-like girls. At the table to the right, in the lower room nearest the audience, are seated* LADY HONORIA PAWSON *and her son* GILBERT PAWSON. LADY HONORIA *is a funereal remnant of past splendor. Her son* GILBERT *is about forty-five and has lived too well; he is short, fat and bilious. Two maids are in the act of setting tea and muffins before them when the curtain rises. Many of the tables are empty, a few are occupied; during the Act all the tables fill, and occasionally the chatter is so general that pauses occur in the principal dialogue.*

LADY H. (*ferreting a handkerchief out of a small bag at her large waist*) That was Sir Charles at the corner table.

MR. GILBERT. (*puffily eating*) No, it wasn't; it was Worburn the brewer.

LADY H. (*powdering her nose, then pulling her veil over it*) It wasn't; it was Sir Charles.

MR. GILBERT. It was Worburn. I lunched with him to-day.

LADY H. (*returning her handkerchief to her bag and shutting it with a snap*) It was Sir Charles. I bowed to him.

MR. GILBERT. Worburn don't mind, he's accustomed to it.

LADY H. I never forget a face. I've a royal memory. Gilbert, you're getting stouter.

MR. GILBERT. (*in a huff*) Whenever I disagree with you, you say I am stouter.



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LADY H. Everything that disagrees with one makes one stouter.

MR. GILBERT. (*sadly contemplating his muffin*) Everything disagrees with me—but one must eat. Everybody does. (GRINSTEAD WORBURN *comes down from the upper room, evidently looking for some one. He is a man of about fifty, very cold and dignified in his manner—his costume rather suggests the stock period—he is more aristocratic in his manner and appearance than the oldest duke in the peerage.* MR. GILBERT *rises effusively*) My dear Worburn, we meet again—delightful lunch you gave us. May I present you to my mother? (*he does so*)

WORBURN. (*gravely*) My dear Lady Pawson, I'm so glad. I had heard you were indisposed—east wind, purely east wind—it affects even me.

LADY H. I have heard so much of you from Gilbert lately, that I positively recognized you as I came in. (*her son is a little staggered by her tact and untruthfulness*)

WORBURN. (*bows slightly—then moves a little apologetically*) I have a few young people to entertain this afternoon; but, like most young people, I fear they have no notion of punctuality. I am now wondering whether by any chance they are waiting for me in the rooms below.

LADY H. My dear Mr. Worburn, find them by all means; don't let us detain you.

WORBURN. (*gravely*) Thank you, I hope to see you on my return. (*he bows, and goes up*)

LADY H. A brewer! Surely a Queen's Counsel?

MR. GILBERT. (*sadly*) A brewer, and a most immoral one, owns most of the shares in a certain theatre and—gets his money's worth.

LADY H. Why don't you tell me more about these people?

MR. GILBERT. It's so dull to talk about other people when one's present oneself; besides, one couldn't discuss Worburn thoroughly with one's mother, he really is so cold-blooded.

LADY H. Shocking!

MR. GILBERT. It's all right, he's decided to marry and settle down at last. (*he turns to a passing maid*) I have no spoon.

MAID. I beg your pardon, sir. (*she gives him one*)

LADY H. (*eating her muffin*) Who's he going to marry?

MR. GILBERT. Oh, anybody! I don't think he's made up his mind. He's making 'em all show their paces—that's one advantage in being a millionaire, they're all ready to do it. (*he passes his mother the muffins*) Won't you? (MABEL BUCKLEY WESTON *is seen in the upper room; she*

*hurries down to the left table in the lower room and seats herself behind it. She is an exceedingly beautiful girl about eighteen, and appears happily excited and flushed. The* HON. JACK KENNERLY *joins her and sits left of her, first helping her to remove her cloak. He is a smart young man about town, of about five-and-twenty*)

JACK. It's all right, they didn't see us!

MABEL. Thank the fates, old Worburn's as blind as a bat. Oh, Jack, what a ripping day we have had!

JACK. We've been jolly lucky too, considering we haven't been spotted once.

MABEL. (*with a long drawn breath*) Oh, if one could only go on doing what one shouldn't all one's life, wouldn't it be exciting!

JACK. (*doubtfully*) Um'm!

MABEL. Where are the muffins? Oh, Jack, doesn't it run to muffins?

JACK. (*looking at dish*) Aren't they—how silly of 'em. I ordered 'em. (*the muffins are brought*) Oh, here they are. Cut into 'em, Mab. If we don't clear out of this before the afternoon gang arrives we're bound to be spotted. (MABEL *pours out the tea*)

MABEL. As soon as I'm fortified by tea, I shall be ready to face even mamma.

JACK. Thanks, I shan't.

MABEL. (*puts down her cup and gives a long sigh*) Oh, Jack, do you realize that this is absolutely the last time we can do this sort of thing?

JACK. Oh, one never knows.

MABEL. *I* know. My future is looming very obviously just now, and tête-à-tête teas with a detrimental must take a back seat. Oh, Jack, I'm so glad you're a detrimental, and needn't be taken seriously; you're really just as useful as a brother and much more exciting.

JACK. (*laughs a little*) I'm glad. (*then gloomily*) I say, do you really want to go to the Aquarium? (MABEL *nods her head vehemently, her mouth being full of muffin*) But it's a deadly place in the afternoon.

MABEL. The deadlier the better; it's our last day of freedom, so let's finish it off feeling fearfully tomby.

JACK. Ranelagh's more fun.

MABEL. Jack, don't be silly. Harry's sure to be there. A nice thing for me if he saw me alone with you. All mamma's castles in the air would topple on top of her.

JACK. It's all very well to pretend that it's only your mother who builds castles upon Sir Harry. You do a bit of building on your own.

MABEL. (*making a little grimace*) I know I do. I've got to marry him for heaps of reasons. Firstly, he's the richest man in the market just now; secondly—well,

that's all; secondly is the same as firstly, and so's thirdly.

JACK. You mercenary little devil!

MABEL. Am I? (*a pause—then rather sadly*) No, I'm not really! It's only a part of what mamma calls the great social scheme. We're all parts of a great social scheme, Jack—you're a part, I'm a part. Fat old Worburn's a part—these girls that wait on us are a part, only I suppose they failed in their parts, so that's why they have to wait on the other parts. (*then she tosses her head as if to shake off unpleasant thoughts—and turns in her chair, looking round the room*) I wish they'd play the "Belle of New York." (*she turns back and meets* JACK'S *glance. So they remain for an instant*) Jack, don't look at me as if you didn't know me.

JACK. (*gravely*) I wonder, do I?

MABEL. Don't you?

JACK. You're ready to marry a man for his money?

MABEL. Of course I am. (*she laughs*) What else is there for a girl to do if she doesn't? Spend her days carrying muffins to the old woman in that corner? No, thank you. Jack, I've been well brought up, so I know now that it's a girl's first duty to marry money, money with position if possible, but money anyhow.

JACK. It's beastly!

MABEL. Is it—how?

JACK. Oh, I can't explain.

MABEL. Well, anyhow, whatever it is—it's what's drummed into us from the word go. It's all part of the great social scheme. It's our one outlook. No, there are others: be a governess—I don't want to. Go on the stage—I'm much too good an actress to have a chance on the stage. No, Jack, if you were a girl you'd be told it from morning till night, *marry well*. Mind you marry well, it's everything; and so you see, rightly or wrongly, we begin to believe it at last, and we jump at £10,000 a year. (*then she leans a little towards him, half closing her eyes in a smile*) But the scheme has its compensations, it makes us enjoy a day like to-day, doesn't it, Jack?

JACK. I s'pose so.

MABEL. Dear old Jack, may I have another muffin? There's not enough butter on this. (*more muffins, which she really doesn't want, are set before her—then she becomes a trifle pensive*) And when I'm married to Sir Harry you'll come and stay with us often, won't you, and cheer me up?

JACK. Do you think you'll want cheering up?

MABEL. Oh, I expect so. Most of the girls who marry well seem to be able to do with a lot of cheering up.

JACK. Is that part of the scheme too?

MABEL. I suppose so.

JACK. I'm rather glad I'm not a girl.

MABEL. So am I, Jack. (*there's a pause—he fiddles with his cup, and her eyes rove round the room*)

JACK. (*suddenly*) In this scheme, doesn't it strike you that something has been left out?

MABEL. What?

JACK. Well, there's a curious, somewhat old-fashioned emotion that crops up sometimes even in modern life.

MABEL. What's that?

JACK. Love.

MABEL. (*bursts into a little laugh of surprise*) Of course, we've left that out! How could one have a workable scheme with love in it? No scheme would hold together for a minute.

JACK. I see—so you ignore it.

MABEL. One can't afford to waste one's time on love nowadays. Life's much too serious a problem. Love's all very well when one's quite young, but one can't let it stand in the way of tangible things, can one?

JACK. No, I suppose not.

MABEL. I think, personally, that love would die out altogether if it weren't for the prolificosity of the modern novelist.

JACK. (*sarcastically*) You know more about it than I do, you're eighteen.

MABEL. (*quite lightly—putting on her gloves*) No, I don't really know anything about it—it's not one of my subjects. I've always let that sort of thing slide.

JACK. Some day it may enter into your head to take it up.

MABEL. Well, when I do, Jack, you shall teach me the rudiments.

JACK. That's a bargain. You won't find it half so dull a thing as you imagine.

MABEL. Shan't I? Perhaps not. But I'm not going to think about it now.

JACK. I wonder what Milanor's views on the subject of love are.

MABEL. Oh! I hope to goodness he hasn't got any. I—I'm afraid I should laugh if he began to get romantic, and that would be awful, wouldn't it?

JACK. You'd never be my Lady Milanor then.

MABEL. Oh, never, and I'd never be mistress of that lovely place in Derbyshire with that divine trout stream.

JACK. Or the little house in Chesterfield Street with the green shutters.

MABEL. I've quite made up my mind to do away with those shutters. Oh, you will dine with us often and often, won't you, Jack?

JACK. Perhaps Milanor won't approve.

MABEL. Oh, he'll have to—because a girl marries it doesn't mean that she gives up her old friends.

JACK. It'll be an awful sell for you, Mab, if he doesn't come up to the scratch.

MABEL. Awful. Oh, but he will. It's not really difficult to convince a man he's in love with you, it only requires plenty of concentration. Watch his moods and fall in with them,—if he's sentimental, sigh with him ; if he's cheerful, keep him in the sunshine. Jack, you should watch me at work—it's really very instructive, and then, of course, mamma is very useful. I'm not fearfully fond of mamma, but I must say she's a good manager. What do you think she's done ?

JACK. What ?

MABEL. She's rented that cottage under the hill—you know, just on the corner of his moor—for three months, so you see I shouldn't be surprised if he and I didn't frequently run up against each other this summer.

JACK. Ah !

MABEL. He's awfully fond of rambling about the country alone—and—and I feel a tendency towards that sort of thing myself.

JACK. Well, of course that does help to clear the ground a bit, doesn't it ?

MABEL. Decidedly.

WORBURN *reappears in the upper room with a party of ladies, among them* ETHEL GLYNDON, *a sweet-looking girl of about seventeen, and her aunt.* MISS ANSTRUTHER, *a plump, cheery little woman of forty.*

WORBURN. (*motioning them all to their seats with grave dignity*) I secured this table—it—it is near the band.

MISS ANSTRUTHER. Sweet of you !

WORBURN. (*to* ETHEL) Miss Glyndon, will you be comfortable ?

ETHEL. I'm always comfortable anywhere. (*and they all sit down, out of sight of the audience*)

MR. GILBERT. (*to his mother*) I have not experienced that curious sense of fulness nearly so acutely to-day.

LADY H. The muffins were better done. I ordered the carriage to come, it should be here. Are you ready to move ?

MR. GILBERT. I would prefer to sit quite still for fifteen minutes.

LADY H. Perhaps it would be wiser. (*they relapse into inertia*)

JACK. I wish you'd fixed on anybody but Milanor.

MABEL. Why ?

JACK. I don't know. He's such an odd sort of chap—always doing such rum things. He's just been and en-

dowed a nospital for children ; that strikes me as rather snobbish.

MABEL. I don't see that.

JACK. Oh, because a man's rich he needn't shove it down your throat like that.

MABEL. (*lightly*) I think it's very nice of him, it's better than throwing away your money on a horse.

JACK. Oh, I don't know. One's usual, the other isn't. Everything that attracts attention is bound to be bad form. Anyhow—he's putting on flesh.

MABEL. I shall have to check that if possible. I'm afraid you'll have to make the best of it, Jack. Mamma and I have agreed to him, so it's no good going back. Mamma tried to persuade me to consider old Worburn—but Worburn! (*she grimaces*)—there must be limits even to a social scheme.

EDITH CADOGAN *comes through the rooms, looking about her, followed by an aimless middle-aged lady. She sees* MABEL *and comes down.*

EDITH. Hullo! Mabel—and Jack—and no chaperon! What's the meaning of this ?

MABEL. Jack and I are out on the razzle.

EDITH. I'd better have tea with you for propriety's sake.

JACK. I don't think it matters in our case—we're too young.

MABEL. Besides, we're cousins.

EDITH. Have you seen Sir Harry ?

MABEL. He's at Ranelagh.

EDITH. He isn't—at least his mother told me she was going to meet him here at four. Mab, you look worried.

MABEL. What at ?

EDITH. I don't know if you don't.

MABEL. I'm not worried—thank you.

EDITH. Mab, will you tell me the truth if I ask you ?

MABEL. It depends.

EDITH. Are you to be congratulated ?

MABEL. No, I'm not—there's a chance for everybody, you see. (*laughs and shrugs her shoulders*)

EDITH. There's none for me—we're much too friendly—you see, he's my trustee. (*she turns and looks round the rooms*) I hate this band, don't you? I—there's Mr. Graeme. We're tea-ing with him this afternoon—pity me! And Julia is with me, and she positively hasn't an idea outside window-boxes. But I say, before I go—I do think you two are silly to come here like this. Of course, I know it means nothing, but—but people *will* talk. There's Julia, for instance. Oh, Mab, what is the good of

all the eloquence I wasted on you when you came to Miss Grand's in Chill Street! Good-bye. (*she saunters up*)

JACK. Who's Miss Grand?

MABEL. I went to school there, with her—she's ages older than I am, and was always telling me things. I hate her—rather. She wanted to marry Sir Harry, and it didn't come off. So I suppose she hates me—rather.

JACK. Because it will come off?

MABEL. Oh, I daresay—don't talk about it. It seems different when she's about. She makes me think of what things are really, and that makes one feel beastly. Don't let's think at all, Jack. It's the only way to be happy. I say, this place is beginning to fill up. Hadn't we better make a move? Shall I pay, or have you got enough?

JACK. Oh, I daresay I can manage it.

MABEL. (*suddenly wheeling round*) Heavens, Jack! Is this the twenty-fourth?

JACK. Yes.

MABEL. Oh, and I've promised to fetch the twins and bring them here to meet mamma at half-past four.

JACK. That'll spoil our afternoon.

MABEL. No it won't. I'll bring them here, and I can easily make an excuse to mother and meet you anywhere—I've got till seven, then I must get back to dress. Sir Harry is dining with us to-night, and——

JACK. And you fancy——

MABEL. Never mind what I fancy. What time is it?

JACK. Five past four.

MABEL. I must go for them in ten minutes. Where shall we meet afterwards?

JACK. You wanted to go to the Aquarium.

MABEL. Nobody ever goes there, that's why. Well, anyhow—— (*she stops suddenly, looking into the other room, then turns and faces him with a gasp*) Jack, the worst has happened. Edith was right, he's here.

JACK. Who?

MABEL. Harry! (*they stare at each other for an instant, then her presence of mind returns*) My gracious, I can't be found alone with you; we *must* have a chaperon. Jack, come and join those two old frumps.

JACK. (*aghast*) But I don't know 'em.

MABEL. (*vehemently*) Neither do I. What matter? Come and join them. (*she stops one of the waiting maids who is passing with tea*) What's that lady's name?

MAID. That's old Lady Pawson, miss, and her son, Mr. Gilbert Pawson. (MABEL *sweeps down towards* LADY PAWSON'S *table, with an outstretched hand and a sweet smile*)

MABEL. I really can't go without saying how-do-you-do, Lady Pawson. We haven't met since that delightful after-

noon. (*she turns to* MR. GILBERT *and shakes hands with him warmly*) How do you do? I hope your gout is better. (*the old lady and her son are deeply agitated.* MABEL *smiles at* MR. GILBERT)

MABEL. I'm afraid your mother doesn't remember me.

LADY H. (*not knowing her in the least*) Perfectly, my dear. How do you do?

MR. GILBERT. (*feebly*) My mother never forgets a face. She has a royal memory.

MABEL. (*sitting down at their table and making herself quite comfortable*) I'm waiting for mamma. But you know how dreadfully unpunctual she always is. Oh, didn't you have any muffins? You really ought to make an effort in the direction of muffins.

LADY H. Gilbert's digestion is very fluctuating.

MABEL. (*with an affectation of great concern*) Oh, don't say you've got to be careful still? I hoped that trouble had passed long ago. Why, you've suffered from that ever since——

MR. GILBERT. Last April twelve months.

MABEL. I remember mamma telling us about it at the time. (JACK *is hovering about the table much embarrassed.* MABEL *smiles in surprise at* LADY PAWSON) Don't you know Mr. Kennerly? Jack, I'm disappointed in you. I thought you knew everybody worth knowing. Lady Pawson, do let me introduce Mr. Jack Kennerly — Lady Pawson, Mr. Kennerly.

JACK. (*sitting down beside* GILBERT PAWSON) Awfully good place to meal in, this, don't you find? Jolly secluded, and all that, and yet you're always running up against people you know.

MR. GILBERT. My mother and I have not run up against anybody for—— Mother, you desire——

LADY H. (*making a brilliant effort to recover herself and remember somebody—snaps out at* MABEL) How's your aunt?

MABEL. (*ingenuously*) Which aunt?

LADY H. (*after a pause,* LADY PAWSON *retrieves herself*) Your dear aunt.

MABEL. (*with a sigh*) She's still on the wane, we fear.

LADY H. Ah, she was always delicate as a girl. (*a long and melancholy silence falls which* MABEL *thoroughly enjoys, then says, with another deep sigh*)

MABEL. Yes, and she never really got over that affair—you know.

MR. GILBERT. (*getting interested*) Dear me.

MABEL. (*to* MR. GILBERT) I always imagine there was something more in that than met the eye, don't you?

MR. GILBERT. Oh, I really——

MABEL. You wouldn't like to say so. That's sweet of you. You live up to your well-earned reputation for discretion—very wise, that's why you're always so popular. (MABEL *turns to say something to* JACK, *and old* LADY PAWSON *seizes the opportunity to gasp at her son*)

LADY H. Who are they?

MR. GILBERT. Don't know. Can't think.

LADY H. Take me away. (*she makes an effort to rise*)

MABEL. Oh, dear Lady Pawson, you will stay and see mamma? She won't be a moment, and she'd be so disappointed if she missed you.

SIR HARRY MILANOR *has been seen in the upper room, he now comes down to their table.*

SIR HARRY. How do you do, Miss Weston?

MABEL. (*looking up in surprise and giving him her hand with a bright smile of welcome*) Oh, how do you do? Fancy you coming to this out-of-the-way little corner. Lady Pawson, may I introduce Sir Harry Milanor? (*bows*) Mr. Gilbert Pawson, Sir Harry Milanor. (*bows*) We're all waiting for mamma, she's so fearfully late again, and Lady Pawson was almost giving her up in despair, weren't you?

LADY H. (*who is approaching a condition of mental pulp*) I—I surely was.

SIR HARRY. (*looking curiously at* JACK) Hullo, Kennerly—it is Kennerly, isn't it?

JACK. It is. How are you? (*they nod to each other smilingly*)

SIR HARRY. Fancy knocking up against you—and at a tea-fight too! (*then he turns brightly to the tea table, signing to one of the waiting maids*) I'm sure Lady Pawson can have some more tea—fresh tea. And muffins. Would you bring us—let's see, how many are we? One, two, three, five—and some hot muffins. (*as he gives the maid the order* LADY PAWSON *has another gasp at her son*)

LADY H. Who is he?

MR. GILBERT. I don't know.

LADY H. Take me away!

SIR HARRY. (*turning to* LADY PAWSON) I think you know my aunt, Lady Pawson.

LADY H. More aunts! Yes, of course, your dear aunt. She was always delicate as a girl. (*aside to her son*) Take me away! Something's gone wrong with my head. I positively don't remember anybody.

SIR HARRY. (*to* MABEL) How are the twins?

MABEL. Oh, they're splendid. I'm just off to fetch them from home now to meet mamma. As a matter of fact, I'd forgotten I'd promised to do it. Lady Pawson, did I tell you that lovely story of the twins? You remember the twins, Mr. Pawson?

MR. GILBERT. Dear creatures!

LADY H. (*aside to her son*) They've gone too. Take me away!

MABEL. Mamma had been awfully busy during the morning, and Harold didn't think he'd had half the attention he was—oh, here's the fresh tea—he was entitled to, and so—— (MR. GILBERT *waves his tea away*)

SIR HARRY. (*surprised*) No tea?

MABEL. (*very sympathetically*) He daren't, he's still a martyr to that dreadful dyspepsia. It's been incessant ever since July twelvemonth.

MR. GILBERT. April.

LADY H. (*having pulled herself together, rises unsteadily*) I—I fear I shan't be able to wait for your mother. I—I find this room too warm. Gilbert dear, the carriage is there, isn't it? (*a passing maid overhears the question*)

MAID. Your carriage has been waiting some minutes, Lady Pawson.

MR. GILBERT. Ah! (*they all rise*)

MABEL. Are you going?

LADY H. (*to her son*) I'm going to Dr. Crawley—it's something mental.

MABEL. In Harley Street? You pass our house.

MR. GILBERT. May we—— (*he is going to bid her farewell*)

MABEL. Drop me! Oh, would you! It would be very nice of you. You're sure I shan't be in the way?

MR. GILBERT. (*quite nonplussed*) Not in the least.

MABEL. It's awfully kind of you. Then I may bring them here in time after all. Good-bye, Sir Harry.

SIR HARRY. (*very gravely*) Until this evening.

MABEL. Oh yes, you're coming to dinner, aren't you? Good-bye. I shall be back with the twins in ten minutes, anyhow. I'm sure you'd like to see them.

SIR HARRY. I should. (MR. GILBERT *shakes hands with* SIR HARRY *and* JACK KENNERLY)

MABEL. Good-bye, Jack. You're off to keep your appointment, I suppose. Lady Pawson, what would you do if you had a cousin who declined to take you to the Academy because he had an appointment to meet a mysterious some one at the Westminster Aquarium? At the south entrance, too?

JACK. The mysterious some one is only a chap who wants to see the prize fight on the biograph.

MABEL. What time are you due there? (*she fixes* JACK'S *eye meaningly*)

JACK. (*looking at his watch*) Five fifteen.

MABEL. Oh, then, as an appointment of that sort is a serious matter, I'll say good-bye to you.

LADY H. Take me away! (ALL *to each other, with*

*smiles and nods, "Good-bye," and* MABEL *goes out chattering gaily to* MR. GILBERT *and* LADY PAWSON. JACK *hangs about for a moment, then crosses to the other table, picks up his gloves, and begins to put them on. The band is playing, and the various tea-tables have filled up with a fashionable throng. The chatter is getting louder)*

JACK. (*shortly*) Good-bye, Milanor.

SIR HARRY. Good-bye. (*and* JACK *goes up through the throng and out of the rooms.* SIR HARRY *sits staring at the carpet, drawing a pattern on it with his stick, then he looks up and all round him, and leans back in his chair with a sigh*) Why the devil does she always bolt whenever she meets me? (*to* MAID) My mother isn't by any chance in any of the other rooms, is she?

MAID. No, Sir Harry, she always has this table.

SIR HARRY. Yes, I thought she did.

*Old* LADY MILANOR *enters. She is about sixty-four, but the judicious use of dye and the powder puff has made her look at least seventy.*

LADY MILANOR. Oh, Harry, you're here. Are you early, or am I late?

SIR HARRY. (*rising*) Well, mother dear, we'll say I'm early.

LADY MILANOR. But, as a matter of fact, I'm late, you think. Well, well, there was a sale at Hampton's, and I could not get away from some lamp-shades—the most ridiculous reductions—positively giving them away.

SIR HARRY. My dear mother, what satisfaction do you get in buying things at less than their value?

LADY MILANOR. Harry, don't be a fool! If I had your means——

SIR HARRY. I wish to God you had!

LADY MILANOR. Don't fly in the face of Providence.

SIR HARRY. What right had Providence to saddle me with twenty thousand a year? (*the maids put a variety of things before* LADY MILANOR. *She waves them away*)

LADY MILANOR. No, not those—tea-cakes, please. You're an inveterate grumbler. What on earth would you have said, or done, for the matter of that, if you'd been a poor man?

SIR HARRY. (*slowly*) I should have had some friends and—and I should have known exactly how I stood, as regards my fellow man—and woman.

LADY MILANOR. I think you know pretty well, as it is. You're thirty-five, horribly wealthy, and unmarried. Considering those three facts, it's obvious that what *you* don't know really isn't worth knowing. What did you want to talk to me about to-day? I'm sorry I couldn't be at home.

I hate being at home. Do ask that band to play. What is it, Harry?

SIR HARRY. It's what you just said. I'm thirty-five, I've got twenty thousand a year, and I'm unmarried.

LADY MILANOR. Well, isn't it a blessed state?

SIR HARRY. No.

LADY MILANOR. What do you want to do?

SIR HARRY. Marry.

LADY MILANOR. Why don't you?

SIR HARRY. Because I've got twenty thousand a year.

LADY MILANOR. Oh, I see. "Love me for myself alone"—you've been reading poetry.

SIR HARRY. No, I've been through several London seasons.

LADY MILANOR. You want a tonic.

SIR HARRY. No, I want a home.

LADY MILANOR. Buy one.

SIR HARRY. That's the dread. I want to make one. Suppose I try, and find out, when it's too late, that it isn't hand-made at all.

LADY MILANOR. Machine-made articles flood the market now.

SIR HARRY. So I observe.

LADY MILANOR. Well, they serve their purpose.

SIR HARRY. They may, but their purpose isn't mine.

LADY MILANOR. My dear boy, marry to-morrow, and with your disposition and wealth no woman would be fool enough to allow you to realize that you weren't perfectly happy. Come, come, amuse me. I've been bored for days.

SIR HARRY. I wanted to talk to you seriously. I suppose it's no use.

LADY MILANOR. (*briskly*) Not a bit, in the afternoon. Come to Hanover Square, about eleven on Friday morning. I can talk seriously then, because I'm due at the dentist's at twelve. Do ask that band to stop playing. It quite takes my thoughts from my tea. I suppose all this rigmarole means that you think you're in love with some one.

SIR HARRY. I can trace several of the symptoms.

LADY MILANOR. You're thirty-five, so it's somebody quite young, I suppose?

SIR HARRY. Quite young.

LADY MILANOR. And somebody to whom you would appear in the light of a great "catch."

SIR HARRY. That's the devil of it.

LADY MILANOR. Well, it's everybody's duty to get married and be disillusioned. She's not on the stage, I suppose?

SIR HARRY. She is not on the stage.

LADY MILANOR. Then take a tonic, plenty of fresh air and exercise, and we'll go into the matter thoroughly on Friday morning—— This is perfectly dreadful tea. Who is she?

SIR HARRY. Do you know Mrs. Buckley Weston?

LADY MILANOR. Took in a paying guest before she married her second husband, and just managed to live in Bruton Street?

SIR HARRY. Yes.

LADY MILANOR. Buckley Weston would be far happier in West Kensington now the family is so numerous—twins, I believe. Her first husband, Mabel's father, was a dear.

SIR HARRY. Mabel takes after her father.

LADY MILANOR. He *would* play the cornet.

SIR HARRY. Mabel has no small vices.

LADY MILANOR. Then what first attracted you to her?

SIR HARRY. Don't think me a fool—but—but—I've watched her playing with the children.

LADY MILANOR. Ah! she's a clever girl.

SIR HARRY. She didn't know I was watching.

LADY MILANOR. A clever girl is always preparing for the unforeseen.

SIR HARRY. (*shrugs his shoulders despairingly*) Perhaps it *would* be better to postpone this conversation till Friday.

LADY MILANOR. Certainly, but you *would* talk.

SIR HARRY. (*he suddenly leans forward and faces her*) Mother, when you were young were you ever real?

LADY MILANOR. (*aghast*) Eh?

SIR HARRY. Or did everybody always go on like this?

LADY MILANOR. Like what? Is anything wrong?

SIR HARRY. Everything's wrong. Nobody has the courage to be natural—does the difference never strike you between you as you are now and you as you are when your maid draws the blinds in your bedroom in the morning?

LADY MILANOR. (*horrified*) Harry!

SIR HARRY. That's when you are yourself. What you are now is a creature of your own creating.

LADY MILANOR. You'd be exceedingly pleased and proud to walk down Bond Street with me as I am when my maid draws my blinds of a morning, wouldn't you, dear?

SIR HARRY. I don't see that Bond Street matters.

LADY MILANOR. You have obviously never seen a somewhat battered old lady of sixty-four sitting on the edge of her bed, realizing that it's time to get up and prepare for the amusements of the day.

SIR HARRY. It must be a pathetic picture.

LADY MILANOR. It is, for the first ten minutes, but it's

wonderful what a tactful maid can achieve. Be grateful, my dear boy, that we do hide our real selves from each other; if we didn't, somebody's popularity would be distinctly on the wane.

SIR HARRY. (*looks at her steadily for some time, then draws a deep breath and rises*) I shall go down to Derbyshire next Wednesday. I begin to feel I want fresh air.

LADY MILANOR. Ah! that's different; people can afford to be themselves when they're all by themselves in the country. Your poor dear father never dreamt of wearing his toupet whenever he was outside the four-mile radius. (*she shakes herself into shape and rises*) I'm going to talk to Lady Carruthers; I saw her nodding in the corner.

*As she passes into the upper room she meets* MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON, *a jaded, somewhat pompous-looking woman of forty.*

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. How do you do, Lady Milanor?

LADY MILANOR. How do, Mrs. Weston?

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. Is my daughter here?

LADY MILANOR. Haven't seen her.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. She was to meet me here with the children. I'm taking them to—how do you do, Mr. Worburn? (LADY MILANOR *joins* LADY CARRUTHERS. MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON *disappears behind arch to another table. There's a burst of laughter from the upper room, and the little party at* WORBURN'S *table breaks up and moves towards the door, chattering cheerfully.* ETHEL, *as she goes, sees* SIR HARRY *and runs down to him with a glad cry and outstretched hands*)

ETHEL. Harry!

SIR HARRY. (*starting up*) Ethel—bless the girl—what are you doing here?

ETHEL. Aunt Gertrude and the Granger girls have been having tea with Mr. Worburn—and he's taking us all to the Opera to-night. (*she stops*) Oh, I forgot, you don't like him.

SIR HARRY. (*drily*) As I know all about him I occasionally have the pleasure of cutting him.

ETHEL. Harry, being your youngest first cousin, I can call you a crank without being rude. He's perfectly charming and——

SIR HARRY. And he's a millionaire.

ETHEL. Just so.

SIR HARRY. (*after a pause*) Heard from Phil lately?

ETHEL. (*looking swiftly up at him*) Yes—this morning.

SIR HARRY. Anything fresh?

ETHEL. (*shaking her head sadly*) Lord Headmount

told mamma he'd try his best to get him the appointment, but you know what that means.

SIR HARRY. Poor old Phil!

ETHEL. (*slowly*) Poor old Phil—poor old me. (*then a pause, and she shrugs her shoulders with a laugh*) Oh, Harry, what's the use of breaking one's heart in this world? Let's keep something to look forward to in the next.

SIR HARRY. Don't talk like that.

ETHEL. You goose, I didn't mean it.

SIR HARRY. (*looking at her gravely*) You love Phil, Ethel, you told me yourself you did.

ETHEL. (*shudders a little*) Don't, don't, it isn't kind of you.

WORBURN. (*from upper room*) Are you coming, Miss Glyndon?

ETHEL. (*brightly*) Are you waiting for me? I'm so sorry. Good-bye, old goose, good-bye. (*and she runs up and rejoins the others, and they go out.* SIR HARRY *stands motionless a minute, then draws a long breath*)

SIR HARRY. Yes, I'll get out of it for a bit, that's what I'll do. (*he starts up as a gaunt, gray-bearded, iron-faced man comes awkwardly towards him*) Uncle Jo, what the devil are you doing here?

UNCLE JO. Your man told me where you were—so here I am. (*he looks round at all the fashionable people in disgust*) What a hole!

SIR HARRY. Isn't it?

UNCLE JO. What goes on here?

SIR HARRY. Tea, and old women and—and other things.

UNCLE JO. Come out of it.

SIR HARRY. That's just what I've been making up my mind to do—get out of it altogether. Uncle Jo, will you come for a week's fishing to Derbyshire?

UNCLE JO. A week's fishing? I don't often take a holiday.

SIR HARRY. You can't afford to, you're so rich.

UNCLE JO. Next week?

SIR HARRY. Or sooner.

UNCLE JO. Next week.

SIR HARRY. Right. Come down there, just you and I, not another soul, and I'll show you life.

UNCLE JO. Any females?

SIR HARRY. Not a soul.

UNCLE JO. Any fish?

SIR HARRY. Shoals.

UNCLE JO. None of this?

SIR HARRY. Heaven forbid! Just real true life—we'll get out of this wilderness if only for ten days, put back our shoulders and breathe.

UNCLE JO. I want to see you on business.

SIR HARRY. To the lions with business. (MABEL *comes through the rooms leading the twins*) Look, do you see that girl?

UNCLE JO. Yes.

SIR HARRY. Isn't she glorious? (*he seizes his uncle's arm*) Uncle Jo, come away from this place. I'm sure that I'm falling in love.

MABEL. (*sweetly*) Still here, Sir Harry? I made sure you'd be gone by now.

SIR HARRY. I'm going at once.

MABEL. That looks as if I drove you away. (*sees her mother at table behind arch*) Oh, mamma, I'm so sorry I'm late. Here they are, and they're both going to be fearfully good.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. You're coming with us?

MABEL. No, I'm going home; I'm tired, I've got a headache. (SIR HARRY *is watching her. She turns towards him with a little sigh*)

SIR HARRY. A headache?

MABEL. It's nothing, only this hateful, ceaseless London racket. (*then she smiles sweetly upon him*) I'm glad you haven't gone. I thought you'd like to shake hands with the twins, because you won't see them for ages.

SIR HARRY. Are they going away?

MABEL. Yes, mamma's taken a little place in the country, and we're all going down for a change—away from all this sort of thing.

SIR HARRY. (*eagerly—bending towards her*) You too? Out of the wilderness into the light.

MABEL. Into the light, yes—into the light. (*they look at each other, then she says slowly and softly, still looking into his eyes*) We meet again this evening?

SIR HARRY. (*gravely*) This evening.

MABEL. (*suddenly*) What do you mean by "out of the wilderness into the light"?

SIR HARRY. I thought you understood.

MABEL. I thought I did too, but now somehow I wonder if my meaning joined with yours. I didn't fancy such thoughts ever came to men.

SIR HARRY. Perhaps you've never known a man—or I a woman. The precious "real" is well wrapped round.

MABEL. Don't the wraps unwind?

SIR HARRY. Not in the wilderness. The air's too cold.

MABEL. But out in the light?

SIR HARRY. Please God—some day—out in the light.

MABEL. (*looks straight into his eyes, and says very seriously and slowly, giving him her hand*) I—I'm glad you're dining with us to-night.

SIR HARRY. (*gravely*) Thank you. Till then—— (*they shake hands, and he goes up through the rooms and out*)

MABEL. (*after a pause, smiles to herself*) That's good. (*then she looks at her watch*) Half-past four. The south entrance at quarter-past five, I said. It's all right. I'm in plenty of time.

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## ACT II.

### THE DARK HOUR BEFORE THE DAWN.

SCENE.—*A corner of the woods surrounding the Borcambe Valley. Large trees overhang on either side, while all around the undergrowth of bracken and bramble grows thickly—an impenetrable wall of green leaves and red berries. The clearing in the centre is thick mossy grass, undulating into mounds. There is a small break in the undergrowth at the back. In the centre of the clearing, the grass growing in the hollow between two mounds is of a lighter color and circular. There are also on either side minor breaks in the bracken through which the children can enter the sacred precincts by going down on their hands and knees. It is now the second of June, and about the middle of the day, when to the singing of birds the curtain rises. After a pause,* SIR HARRY *forces his way through the bushes, his hat on the back of his head, his necktie flying, his hands deep in the pockets of his shooting coat, the whole man brimful of the joy of life. He looks round at the scene and smiles. He is followed by* UNCLE JO, *who looks particularly grim and unimpressionable.*

SIR HARRY. (*beaming*) Now, didn't I tell you I'd take you somewhere where you could put your shoulders back and breathe? Didn't I tell you I'd show you a spot?

UNCLE JO. Is this it?

SIR HARRY. This is it.

UNCLE JO. (*shortly*) Oh!

SIR HARRY. (*not to be dashed*) I knew you'd like it. I discovered this place when I was a kid. I grew up on that mound, under these trees. I've known these ferns when they were ten feet high, and I fought my way through them despite the attacks of frogs and—and snakes and bears and elephants, and all the other mighty denizens of the forest—fought my way through 'em, yes, that's where I came. (*he points to a little break in the undergrowth*) That's the pass I stormed, till victory was mine, and the great peace of this space spread out before me, and I sat down under this mighty hill and looked around upon my kingdom. (*proudly*) My kingdom!

UNCLE JO. Very interesting.

SIR HARRY. Yes, isn't it? Look! Look! (*he points to the circular patch of grass in the centre*) The fairies' ring! Just as green, just as—— Uncle Jo, don't look at it in that sniffy way.

UNCLE JO. I shall look at it in my own way.

SIR HARRY. Well, y' know, the fairies won't like it, I'm jolly well sure they won't.

UNCLE JO. (*taking out his paper angrily*) Ugh!

SIR HARRY. You're very fidgetty, Uncle Jo. You asked me this morning with tears in your eyes to show you the spots where I used to play as a child, and because I allow you to look at 'em, you become sniffy.

UNCLE JO. I asked you to take me somewhere where I could smoke in peace without running the risk of meeting any females.

SIR HARRY. Well, it's done. Nobody knows of the existence of this spot except me. I ought really to have blindfolded you before I brought you here, and I almost fancy I should chloroform you before I take you away.

UNCLE JO. You're a fool.

SIR HARRY. Don't be so short with me, Uncle Jo. I'm really very fond of you when you're not short with me. Now, you make yourself comfortable against that mountain, and I'll make myself comfortable against this one, and we'll each smoke a cigar, think over our past lives, and forget that there's such a place as London, or such an abomination of desolation as a London season.

UNCLE JO. You told me there were to be no females—we're not here two days, when who should we meet but the Buckley Westons.

SIR HARRY. Coincidence. How was I to know they'd rented the cottage?

UNCLE JO. Ugh!

SIR HARRY. Personally I'm very glad, it's given me just the chance I wanted.

UNCLE JO. How?

SIR HARRY. (*softly, almost to himself*) I've seen a real woman at last.

UNCLE JO. I've seen too many.

SIR HARRY. I never saw one before, and I'm thirty-five. Perhaps it's my fault, I may have been blind. (*a pause*) Don't you think she's real?

UNCLE JO. Who?

SIR HARRY. Mabel Weston. (*they smoke in silence*) I like to think of her as I see her here, a wandering wild flower in a world of wild flowers. (*another pause*) There are no wild flowers in Bond Street: perhaps you haven't observed that fact.

UNCLE JO. (*waving paper*) Damn the gnats!

SIR HARRY. (*blandly*) Gnats now—gnats! there's

something very touching about gnats. (*and he wipes one out of his eye.* UNCLE JO *moves to a tree with a grunt*) Now, don't fidget and snort about, and don't dare to put your great hoof inside that ring; just come peacefully back and sit on your mountain if you please. Here are the matches for you. (*he tosses them to his uncle*) How old are you, Uncle Jo?

UNCLE JO. (*lighting his cigar*) Sixty-five.

SIR HARRY. Well, are you as good a man as you were fifty-five years ago? (UNCLE JO *grunts fiercely*) It's no use grunting, you're not—you can't see as well now as you did then—I can't either. In those days these ferns were ten feet high at least—we've grown up, opened our eyes wider—and behold! the ferns are only three feet high—we've lost sight of seven feet of beautiful ferns, because we don't see as clearly as we did when we were eight years old.

UNCLE JO. If I had many walks with you, young man, I think I should do you a mischief.

SIR HARRY. Oh, no, you wouldn't—you like my conversation very much indeed really—you think it over while you're trying to go to sleep and it does you a lot of good. Look at that bird's nest; that bird's nest was there thirty years ago, I remember it perfectly, only it was miles and miles higher up the tree, or perhaps the tree was miles and miles taller, it was one or the other. Uncle Jo, don't you feel rather dozy?

UNCLE JO. No, I don't.

SIR HARRY. You don't! You are an odd old person, aren't you, Uncle Jo? (*a pause*) Uncle Jo, if you don't feel dozy—there used to be a rabbit-hole behind that oak tree, thirty years ago, with a rabbit in it; you might go and grub about and see if he's there still; if he is, you might tell him I'm here too, it'll interest him very much; we used to be very friendly, at least I used to be, he was rather retiring. (HARRY *is lying at full length on one of the mounds—his hands folded behind his head*) I'm not looking at you, Uncle Jo, but I know perfectly well that you're reading a paper—a financial paper, all about things that go up and down, aren't you, Uncle Jo?

UNCLE JO. I am.

SIR HARRY. The fairies won't like it, I'm jolly well sure they won't, right on the top of their mountain too. Uncle Jo, it must be very hard on you being a moneygrub. Of all sorts of grubs, it must be worst to be a moneygrub; doesn't it make you very, very sad, being such a nasty sort of grub, Uncle Jo?

UNCLE JO. No, it doesn't.

SIR HARRY. Your goloshes don't keep you dry while you're sitting down, Uncle Jo.

UNCLE JO. I'm aware of that, sir.

SIR HARRY. (*sleepily*) Dear old Uncle Jo!

UNCLE JO. I'll thank you not to Uncle Jo me quite so thoroughly.

SIR HARRY. Not—dear old Uncle Jo. (*a long pause*) Uncle Jo?

UNCLE JO. What?

SIR HARRY. You are said to be the shrewdest, as well as one of the wealthiest men on the Stock Exchange.

UNCLE JO. Ugh!

SIR HARRY. Is it true?

UNCLE JO. Quite.

SIR HARRY. Then why don't you give me some money for my hospital?

UNCLE JO. Ugh!

SIR HARRY. Won't you give me some, Uncle Jo?

UNCLE JO. No.

SIR HARRY. Oh, don't say it off like that so quickly—think it over a little. Uncle Jo, won't you?

UNCLE JO. No.

SIR HARRY. You said you didn't like my keeping on saying Uncle Jo, didn't you, Uncle Jo?

UNCLE JO. I did.

SIR HARRY. Well, if I promise I won't mention such a horrid thing as Uncle Jo—for—for—two hours, will you give me a thousand pounds?

UNCLE JO. No!

SIR HARRY. Oh, well, will you give me back my matches? (UNCLE JO *tosses them to him with a grunt*) Uncle Jo, have you noticed anything odd about me lately?

UNCLE JO. Nothing odder than usual.

SIR HARRY. I'm awfully in love. I'm glad you've not noticed it. Wouldn't it be awful, if when one had a real bad attack of love, one came out in spots? I think that's a very lucky thing about love.

UNCLE JO. Mabel?

SIR HARRY. Mabel. (*a pause*) And the dear thing won't even look at me. I thought there was hope ten days ago, but lately—Uncle Jo, do you know, she's been positively snubby? (*a pause*) I seem to be talking about this very lightly—but—don't you be deceived—that's only my safety-valve. (*a pause*) I've written a poem on her. (*a pause*) I don't mean I've written *on* her—I mean it's about her—would you like to hear it?

UNCLE JO. No!

SIR HARRY. I'm sorry for that—it might cheer you up. You are looking so grumpy, Uncle Jo.

UNCLE JO. Am I? (*a pause.* SIR HARRY *puffs away contentedly at his cigar, and* UNCLE JO *becomes immersed in finance*)

SIR HARRY. Uncle Jo, there's a lizard going along round that tree, I wonder where he's going. Where should you say he was going, Uncle Jo?

UNCLE JO. To the devil, like most other young people!

SIR HARRY. The fairies won't like your language; I'm jolly well sure they won't. (*a pause*) Uncle Jo, do you see that sort of a tunnelly kind of hole, under those ferns?

UNCLE JO. Yes.

SIR HARRY. That's where I used to crawl through when I—oh, I forgot—I told you that before. (*a pause.* SIR HARRY *is looking at the hole—suddenly he sits up listening*) Do you hear that? (*he rises*) Come away, Uncle Jo. Le roi est mort, vive le roi! Come away! (*he seizes him*)

UNCLE JO. What the devil——

SIR HARRY. Hush, come away—we've no right here—we're only "grown-ups" now. Come away, the King and Queen are coming to their throne, come away. (*and he hurries* UNCLE JO *out through the bushes at the back, and forces him to hide behind a tree. After a pause a small golden head appears through the undergrowth, and* HAROLD *crawls solemnly on, followed by his twin sister* MARJORIE. *When they have successfully got through the brambles and ferns they turn and cautiously drag in after them a miniature barrow heavily laden with stores which they solemnly wheel to the centre of the glade.* HAROLD *then sits down on one side of the barrow and* MARJORIE *sits on the other, and they both simultaneously give vent to a sigh of satisfaction over labor nobly done, contemplating with triumph the contents of the barrow*)

HAROLD. We gotted 'em.

MARJORIE. I gotted the bones.

HAROLD. I *do* hope Puppy won't know who wented to his kennel when he was out.

MARJORIE. He won't—unless the fairies tells him.

HAROLD. Which they won't—'cos we only stoled 'em for them—let's put 'em on their table. (*they then proceed to remove the old bones from the barrow and put them into the fairies' ring*)

MARJORIE. This is a splendashious dinner for 'em, isn't it? (*she holds up the dusty remains of a haddock and surveys it with much admiration*) I specs they'll just love that.

HAROLD. I specs so. I gotted this from the dust-hole.

MARJORIE. I specs they'd like it better to have jam wiv it.

HAROLD. (*contemplating his sister with a reproachful sigh*) You etted up all your jam—you always does.

MARJORIE. (*solemnly*) I likes jam—'sides, 'en's not

good for these sort of fairies—it's bones and yaddicks and sawdust they likes best.

HAROLD. How do you know?

MARJORIE. I—I must have yeard 'em say so. (*a pause*) Yes, I must 'ave.

HAROLD. (*sniffing at the dilapidated fish*) It's werry nice and smelly—this one is. (*he holds it out to* MARJORIE, *who sniffs it ecstatically*)

MARJORIE. Werry nice. I specs that's what 'tracts 'em. (*then follows a silence, during which they sniff dreamily at the haddock skin. Their joy is interrupted by the distant voice of* NURSE *calling through the trees*—"Master Harold! Miss Marjorie! where are you?")

HAROLD. (*after a scared pause—during which the two listen*) She mustn't know 'bout thish plache, mush she—we's the only people that know 'bout thish plache—no un else mus ever know.

MARJORIE. Cert'ny not. Come on.

HAROLD. (*pointing pensively to the haddock*) Marj—she's so sniffy—think she'll be able to sniff as far as to this?

MARJORIE. (*gloomily*) I specs so. (*and she crawls off*)

HAROLD. (*following* MARJORIE) I yope she won't, she's so very gyeedy, she won't leave none for ye poor little fairies. (*and they both solemnly disappear under the ferns, pushing the empty barrow before them*)

SIR HARRY. (*coming down*) It was beastly caddish of us to listen, but—but wasn't it beautiful, Uncle Jo?

UNCLE JO. Children's talk!

SIR HARRY. I wish we didn't forget how to talk like that. What a selfish little brute I must have been when I was a child. I used to be very friendly with the fairies—but—but I used to think it was their business to do things for me, not me for them. It never struck me that they had appetites like other people. *I* never brought them luxuries on a barrow—did you, Uncle Jo?

UNCLE JO. No!

SIR HARRY. And such delicate dishes too. (*he gingerly picks up the haddock*) I think the new generation is a little in advance of the old. I must have long talks with that King and Queen—they—they'll do me good. (*and he reverently replaces the dilapidated fish-skin in the ring*)

UNCLE JO. You fail to observe that they are supplying their friends with other people's goods. The bones belong to the puppy, and the—that—whatever it is, is the perquisite of the dustman. That's the sort of generosity we are all quite ready to indulge in.

SIR HARRY. Uncle Jo, how did you get all the money you've got?

UNCLE JO. By hard work and keeping my eyes open.

SIR HARRY. That's how they got their treasure—this—and these bones.

UNCLE JO. Ugh!

SIR HARRY. But they've been beautiful and given their gains away.

UNCLE JO. Wise children!

SIR HARRY. Of course they are—but how about you? You've kept your haddock in your pocket and your bones under your pillow. It's very wrong of you, Uncle Jo, very wrong, and I'm not at all sure that it's healthy. (*pause*) Do you see the point?

UNCLE JO. Yes, but I don't mean to give you a thousand pounds, so that's all about it.

SIR HARRY. You do put things so concisely, Uncle Jo, that's why I'm so very fond of you.

UNCLE JO. (*with a grunt of disapproval*) You going to loll there all day?

SIR HARRY. I must have a serious talk to myself occasionally, you know.

UNCLE JO. Well, I'm going back.

SIR HARRY. Have another. (*offering cigar-case*)

UNCLE JO. No, thank you, this'll take me as far as the house. Good-bye for the present.

SIR HARRY. Good-bye! (UNCLE JO *disappears through trees at the back*)

SIR HARRY. (*makes himself quite comfortable*) Now I shouldn't be a bit surprised—if I didn't have just a little doze—nobody in the world knows where I am, except me. (EDITH CADOGAN'S *voice is heard talking to* UNCLE JO)

EDITH. It's very fortunate meeting you. I'll find him. (*and she pushes her way through the ferns*)

SIR HARRY. My gracious, it's Edith—what on earth are you doing here?

EDITH. I drove over with your mother and Hugh Graeme from the Hydro. I've brought you some more papers to go through.

SIR HARRY. Oh, lord, if anybody ever makes me a trustee again—I—I'll—— (*he waves politely to her*) Take a mound?

EDITH. (*looking down at him*) No, thank you.

SIR HARRY. How's mother?

EDITH. Blooming.

SIR HARRY. She going to be at the Hydro long?

EDITH. I don't know.

SIR HARRY. How did you find out this spot—nobody knows of it, except me.

EDITH. We ran into your uncle just this minute.

SIR HARRY. It's very careless of Uncle Jo, that's all I can say.

EDITH. Aren't you glad to see me?

SIR HARRY. No.

EDITH. Not a bit?

SIR HARRY. Not a bit.

EDITH. I don't believe you, Harry. You're very fond of me really, because I haven't thrown myself at your head as other girls have.

SIR HARRY. Oh!

EDITH. Your mother has been telling me this morning how very trying you find it—being so badgered. Why not give all your money away—to me, for instance—then perhaps some one who isn't too particular might—— (*she laughs down at him*) What is it? "Love you for yourself alone!"

SIR HARRY. I wish you'd go away.

EDITH. (*smiling*) You're a sentimental old darling, that's what you are. You will go through those papers for me, won't you?

SIR HARRY. Um!

EDITH. And send them back to me to-night?

SIR HARRY. Yes. (*she pulls a fern and sits beside him, then casually strokes his cheek with it*)

EDITH. (*softly*) Harry?

SIR HARRY. (*dozily*) Um!

EDITH. Is that all?

SIR HARRY. What more do you want?

EDITH. You never care to understand now—do you?

SIR HARRY. No.

EDITH. Do you remember the talks we used to have?

SIR HARRY. Christians, awake! What a question! Which talks—what about?

EDITH. About life—serious life.

SIR HARRY. Oh, lord, yes!

EDITH. We never have them now.

SIR HARRY. Who wants to repeat oneself?

EDITH. Would it be repeating oneself?

SIR HARRY. Wouldn't it? Besides, the facts aren't the same.

EDITH. You do remember the talks?

SIR HARRY. If you mean a serious talk I had with you at the Gordons' dance?

EDITH. (*sentimentally*) Out on the leads off the landing, under that shabby awning. You do remember?

SIR HARRY. Yes, you were engaged to Dick Rhodes, and for some odd reason you confided to me that you rather despised him.

EDITH. Well, I did as you wished—I broke it off next day.

SIR HARRY. (*sitting up*) As I wished! I like that;

what difference did it make to me? I said I thought you were a fool, or perhaps rather worse, to be engaged to be married to a man you "rather despised," that's all—and—and—you chucked him—no fool you.

EDITH. Do you know Hugh Graeme?

SIR HARRY. Yes—at school with him.

EDITH. What do you think of him?

SIR HARRY. Damn good chap. Not brainy—but damn good chap.

EDITH. He wants me to marry him!

SIR HARRY. Oh! Damn good chap, not brainy—but a damn good chap.

EDITH. I think I shall.

SIR HARRY. Ah!

EDITH. You haven't any advice to give me *now*, I suppose?

SIR HARRY. (*stretching himself lazily*) My dear girl—out on the leads—under a shabby awning—with an occasional star and a soothing band from the room below, one may let oneself drift into giving advice—but not here. We *live* here—we don't float about in darkness on a tune.

EDITH. (*shortly*) I shall marry him.

SIR HARRY. I should.

EDITH. Thank you.

HUGH. (*heard calling*) I say, Miss Cadogan?

EDITH. There he is.

SIR HARRY. Nice voice.

HUGH. Where are you?

EDITH. I'm coming.

HUGH. Oh! in there. (*he comes in. He is a heavily built man with a very large moustache*) Here you are. Lady Milanor is beginning to complain of cramp. Hullo, Milanor!

SIR HARRY. Hullo!

EDITH. Very well. (*she moves away brightly smiling*) I'll give your love to your mother, Harry, and so leave you, and seriously I'll take your advice this time.

SIR HARRY. Eh! (*she bends down and whispers*)

EDITH. I'll marry him.

SIR HARRY. I believe you will. What are some women made of? (*she laughs, and turns to* GRAEME *sweetly*) Let's go.

HUGH. (*crossing swiftly to* SIR HARRY) I say—has she told you?

SIR HARRY. What?

HUGH. That I want to——

SIR HARRY. Oh, yes.

HUGH. Wish you'd put in a good word.

SIR HARRY. I have.

HUGH. Awfully good of you—at one time she led me to

suppose that you—er—and of course you're so deuced rich that I knew if you did I'd have no earthly—but you don't.

SIR HARRY. Certainly not. I'm her trustee; it would be illegal.

HUGH. (*much impressed*) Oh, would it? I didn't know—I'm an awful ass really; people don't know it, but I am. Think she'll——?

SIR HARRY. Sure she'll—she said she would.

HUGH. (*delightedly*) Did she?

EDITH. (*from back calling*) Must I go alone, Hugh?

HUGH. Coming! (*and he dashes after her*)

SIR HARRY. What a nuisance they all are. If all this rabble keep on coming here the fairies won't like it—I'm jolly well sure they won't. (*his eyes rove lovingly round the scene, and at length come to a standstill at the sight of a note sticking out of a cleft in the trunk of a tree*) Well, I'm hanged if somebody hasn't written a note and stuck it up in that tree. How dare they do such a thing? How positively dare they? (*he gets up and approaches it gingerly*) Now, who put it there? It couldn't be the King—he's too small—or the Queen either. No, they couldn't have done it, not even by standing on each other's heads. The fairies wouldn't approve of this sort of thing—I'm jolly well sure they wouldn't. I'd better put a stop to it at once. (*he takes out the note and looks at it*) Not addressed to a single soul—this is very embarrassing—it may be meant for me—it must be meant for me—I'm the only person here. I—I hope it isn't important. (*he opens it and reads*) "If I'm a minute late I don't suppose I shall come at all."—Hm! concise. Now, I wonder who it's from and to, and how long it's been there. It's altogether really very odd. I think I'll put it back again. (*he does so*) Hullo, more people—somebody must have told everybody about this place. It isn't half such a cosy corner as it used to be when I was eight years old. (*he goes behind one of the bushes*) It's killed that rabbit; I'm jolly well sure it has. (*and down through the opening strolls the immaculate youth* JACK KENNERLY. *He comes to the tree and takes the note, opens it, reads it carelessly, tears it up, puts the pieces in his pocket, and proceeds to light a cigarette, remarking to himself after about the third puff*)

JACK. Well, if she thinks I'm going to kick my heels about here all day she's jolly well mistaken—my train goes at one fifty.

SIR HARRY. (*having recognized voice, says*) Hello, Kennerly!

JACK. Who the—— Hello! (*as* SIR HARRY *comes round the bush there is an awkard pause; it is obvious that* JACK *is not over glad to see* SIR HARRY)

SIR HARRY. (*contentedly sitting down against tree*) By gad, isn't it a beautiful day?

JACK. It is. (*another pause*)

SIR HARRY. Now, ye know, I can't help wondering to myself what brings you here.

JACK. I was wondering the same about you.

SIR HARRY. I belong here. I—I understand this place—you don't—you ought to keep on the gravel path, you ought indeed. You seem fidgetty, are you expecting any one?

JACK. No.

SIR HARRY. If she's a minute or two late she isn't coming at all—so I'm not in your way, am I?

JACK. Oh! you read it?

SIR HARRY. Yes. I thought somebody ought to read it. It—it looked as if it was just pining for a little attention.

JACK. There's a great charm about you, Milanor.

SIR HARRY. (*blandly*) Yes, there is, isn't there? Are you going to wait here much longer?

JACK. Yes.

SIR HARRY. Oh! then I think I'll go away.

JACK. Thank you.

SIR HARRY. Don't mention it. Is she pretty?

JACK. Yes.

SIR HARRY. Lucky man. (*he looks at* JACK *with a sigh*) You've no income, no prospects, nothing in the world but just yourself: and—and—"If she's a minute or two late, she isn't coming at all." (*a pause*) Kennerly, she means coming. Stand there waiting for her, if you have to wait a thousand years, it's worth it—she's coming just to see you. (*he goes away through trees—touching a berry here and a fern there as he goes*)

JACK. *to himself*) 'Pon my soul, I believe that fellow's mad. (*then he begins sniffing*) Fish! I smell bad fish. (*he sees the fish and the bones*) How the dickens did this filth get here? (*and he gingerly chucks it all away over the bushes. After a moment's pause* MABEL *comes quickly through the ferns, a little out of breath, but looking very sweet and happy*)

MABEL. Oh! I am so sorry, Jack, but I've been looking for the twins.

JACK. Lost again?

MABEL. Yes, they've been lost for half-an-hour.

JACK. They'll turn up.

MABEL. Oh yes, I hope so.

JACK. They can't climb the wall, and there's no pond for them to fall into, so they're sure to be all right.

MABEL. You think so?

JACK. Sure so—aren't you?

MABEL. Yes, I suppose I am.

JACK. Then we can have a minute or two all alone.

MABEL. Yes, if you're very good.

JACK. I'm always good.

MABEL. Pretty good?

JACK. (*softly*) Would you like me to be wicked?

MABEL. I don't know.

JACK. Would you like to experimentalize?

MABEL. (*looking at him*) No, I don't think so.

JACK. You seem doubtful.

MABEL. I'm not a bit.

JACK. (*getting a little nearer to her*) There's a horrible fascination in doing things you know are quite wrong.

MABEL. I know there is—that's why I'm here.

JACK. (*slowly, with a great deal of intention*) Do you mean that?

MABEL. What?

JACK. You know.

MABEL. I don't. (*their eyes meet, she shrinks a little from him*) What do you look at me like that for?

JACK. I—I'm awfully—head-over-ears in love with you.

MABEL. Does that make you look at me like that?

JACK. Yes!

MABEL. It isn't a nice look—it—it seems to have a lot behind it.

JACK. It has!

MABEL. I'm sorry I came.

JACK. That's not true—you—you know it isn't true! (*he bends quite close to her*)

MABEL. (*repulsing him*) No, I don't want you any nearer. (*a pause. He backs off, she sits on one of the mounds, her chin in her hands, and stares at him*) Jack, it's awfully curious, isn't it?

JACK. What is?

MABEL. Why, all this—the way we're going on now. Just fancy you and I being so silly after having known each other all these years!

JACK. It isn't being silly—it's being wise.

MABEL. We never dreamed of this sort of thing in London. What's happened? Both of us seem to be two people now, when we meet with other people about——

JACK. (*bending over her, interrupts softly*) There's no fun in that!

MABEL. I know there isn't now, that's the funny part, everything's so changed—but—but—when we're quite alone—and—and—together like this—it all gets so—so curious—it gets—gets as if it were dizzy—doesn't it? You don't seem to be a bit like you. You don't seem to be a bit like anybody real—you're just a—a—oh! I can't explain—and I seem to be—a—oh! not myself a bit—or—no

—yes—I am myself. I'm part of myself—but the part of me that I know and everybody else knows seems far away. It's awfully curious. I—I wonder why I came?

JACK. Because you couldn't help it.

MABEL. I won't come any more!

JACK. Yes, you will!

MABEL. No, I won't!

JACK. I love you, Mabel!

MABEL. Do you? (*a long pause*) I don't love you—at least, I don't think I do. No. I'm quite sure I don't—because, when I think you over, somehow it strikes me that you're quite ordinary, and if I loved you, you couldn't be ordinary, could you? (*then she breaks off, and says in a most matter-of-fact manner*) And, besides, I don't believe in love.

JACK. May I come and sit quite close to you? (*she doesn't answer, he comes quietly and stands beside her*) You're not really sorry you came?

MABEL. I am—and—I'm not—that's where it's so funny. (*he puts out his hand and gently touches her hair, then bends to kiss her, she shrinks from him*) No—don't—Jack—don't, please.

JACK. (*softly*) I kissed you before once, why mayn't I now? A kiss is such a little thing.

MABEL. It isn't—it—it's an awful thing—that kiss began it all.

JACK. Of course it did.

MABEL. Why should it be—be so unsettling to one? No—don't. (*she moves from him*) I'm serious about this—I thought you'd understand. (*then suddenly*) This is the last time I'm ever going to be alone with you, Jack. I made up my mind to that while I was coming here—you—you—you're not a good influence—you make me perturbed.

JACK. (*in a whisper*) Mab, there isn't a soul anywhere near us—we're all alone. God's beautiful sky, and the trees, and—and the soft grass—and—and—oh, everything that makes life beautiful; and, if I come and sit quite close to you, like this, and just put my arm round you, like this—and—oh! Mab, I may kiss you again, mayn't I?

MABEL. (*slowly*) No, Jack—don't. It—it's awfully wrong really. I've been in a sort of a cloud ever since that night, but—but—every time I see you now, I *know* that it all means nothing between you and me.

JACK. Why doesn't it? You liked it when I kissed you, didn't you?

MABEL. Yes, but I don't think that's quite the point. You didn't kiss me, you—you—kissed the *woman* in me—and—and—that kiss has made a difference. Don't, Jack—you mustn't do it again. (*this quite serious and slow*)

JACK. As you please. (*he saunters away*)

MABEL. Oh, Jack, if one could only understand what it all means!

JACK. (*with a laugh*) *I* can.

MABEL. Oh no, you can't, you can't at all, that's why it's so horrid. Why should you be able to unsettle me, when you can't really understand anything? You talk about "the sky and the trees"—but, oh, Jack, you—you—don't care a bit about them really—you—— (*then with a complete change she breaks off*) Oh, don't let's talk about this any more—let's go and look for the twins.

JACK. (*reproachfully*) Oh, I say, Mab, don't go on like this; it isn't as if we had all the morning, my beastly train goes at one fifty, and I shan't see you again for months.

MABEL. That's a good thing.

JACK. (*coming to her and holding out his arms*) Mab!

MABEL. Don't be silly, Jack—we'll forget this last ten days, and go back to where we were before.

JACK. We can't. I can't, and I'm sure you can't.

MABEL. I can. (*a long pause*) I am.

JACK. (*whispers*) Are you really, Mabel? (*she is sitting on the slope of the mound. He is kneeling close, and a little above her. As he speaks, he steals his hands round her throat, and turns her face up towards his, till their eyes meet in a long look. She shivers a little, but makes no resistance; as he bends his face nearer her, she whispers*)

MABEL. Don't, Jack—oh, don't—it's so awfully wrong. (*and their lips meet—then there is a long pause, during which he draws her closer to him. They become listless, she stares out in front of her. He takes her hand and strokes it gently with his own. She says slowly*) Where are we drifting, do you know, Jack?

JACK. I'm too happy to think.

MABEL. I *must* think. (*a pause*) Are you really happy, Jack?

JACK. Yes.

MABEL. Really and truly happy?

JACK. (*kissing her hands tenderly*) Really and truly.

MABEL. I'm not. I'm miserable—oh, so miserable! (*she flings herself away from him and lies on the mound, her face hidden in her hands*)

JACK. Mab! Mab!

MABEL. I—I'm beginning to understand. (*she gets up and walks towards the bushes at one side and pulls at the leaves; then after a pause, she says quietly*) Jack, you—you say you—love me?

JACK. (*softly*) You know I love you. (MABEL *bows her head a little, still pulling abstractedly at the leaves, passing them through and through her fingers*)

MABEL. Then you—you'd like to marry me? (*there is a pause—she realizes the silence—looks up quickly, and turns questioningly to him*) Why don't you answer?

JACK. (*slowly and a little lamely*) Of course I'd like to marry you.

MABEL. Why have you never said anything about it?

JACK. Oh, because—— (*he laughs lightly*)—it's impossible—it would be too absurd.

MABEL. (*stares at him in silence, then says quietly*) I don't quite understand that.

JACK. (*nervously*) Why, my dear girl, I've no money, you've no money. A pretty figure we should cut if we married.

MABEL. (*slowly*) "A pretty figure we should cut"—and yet you love me.

JACK. That's very different. I can't help loving you.

MABEL. But you can help marrying me, I see. How nice to have so much self-control! (*the two stand staring at each other, till he drops his eyes and kicks at the turf in embarrassment*) I'm glad I came out here to you to-day—you've steadied me. (*a pause. They look at each other curiously*) Do you know, during this last week, I've been seriously thinking of letting my chances of a brilliant future slip through my fingers?

JACK. Why?

MABEL. You. (*looking at him intently*) The new "you"—what you said and—and—did—made it seem suddenly wrong of me to marry him.

JACK. I didn't mean——

MABEL. (*interrupting sorrowfully*) You didn't mean anything, I know that now. Do you remember talking to me chaffingly in London about love, and telling me if ever I took up the subject you'd teach me the rudiments? I think you've done it, don't you? But the odd part is, that up to a minute ago, I had begun to think love too serious to be a game.

JACK. A minute ago?

MABEL. You made me understand that love is nothing really; you can take my hands, you can kiss me, shame me in my own eyes and your own, because you love me. What comes of it? (*she laughs a little*) "I've no money—you've no money. A pretty figure we should cut." Your own words, Jack, your own words, just think them over. You've brought me back again to common sense. No, no! Love may be very attractive, but marriage is more tangible. I'll marry Sir Harry and find my amusement in seeing how it turns out. (*she gives a hard little laugh and swings on her heel as if to go*)

JACK. You're angry with me?

MABEL. You're only a coward, that's all.

JACK. You're unjust. I should be a coward to marry you. I can give you nothing, he can give you everything. (*then passionately*) Oh, Mabel!

MABEL. (*checks him with a bitter little smile*) Don't worry yourself. I'm very grateful to you, Jack. But for you I might have made a fool of myself. As you love me so very dearly I promise you one thing. I'll write and let you know when the wedding day is fixed.

JACK. (*shortly*) Thank you! I suppose it will come off?

MABEL. Oh yes, with a little tact—I'm very young, but I've been well trained. (*then her voice breaks a little, and she turns and faces him, her lips quivering, her eyes filling with tears*) But look here, Jack: don't go on thinking you're in love and kissing people—it may be all right for you, but—but it's a little dangerous for the girl.

JACK. You mean——

MABEL. I mean—that—that—it very nearly made a difference to me.

JACK. (*coming to her*) What difference?

MABEL. It tempted me for a moment to think that perhaps there were things in life more important than making one of the biggest matches of the season.

SIR HARRY *comes down through the trees, is surprised at seeing* MABEL.

SIR HARRY. You! You!

MABEL. (*with a complete change of manner turns to* SIR HARRY *with a sunny smile*) I—I suppose we're trespassing, aren't we?

SIR HARRY. Not a bit. But how on earth did you discover this out-of-the-way corner of the world?

MABEL. I came here to meet Jack, because I thought we should be quite alone.

SIR HARRY. (*gravely*) I see! Then it is clearly my duty to remove myself.

MABEL. That doesn't follow. Jack and I have had a very serious talk, but we've said all we had to say—and—and it's over—and he has forgiven me.

SIR HARRY. (*looking from one to the other*) What had he to forgive?

MABEL. A great deal, hadn't you, Jack?

JACK. (*laughing*) A great deal—are you coming back to the house?

MABEL. No, I'm going to sit here and talk to Sir Harry.

SIR HARRY. Seriously?

MABEL. I always talk seriously.

JACK. It's nearly lunch-time.

MABEL. I hate lunch! If I'm late, explain to mamma that I've lost myself in the woods with Sir Harry.

JACK. (*shortly*) I will. (*he strolls away. She laughs lightly as he moves, then calls after him*)

MABEL. I'll write to you as I promised, you ought to get the letter in two days. Good-bye.

JACK. Thanks! I shan't see you again then—my train goes at one fifty.

MABEL. So it does! Good-bye.

JACK. Good-bye. (*and he goes*)

SIR HARRY. (*looking at* MABEL, *who is lying against the mound, her hands clasped behind her head, looking up into the sky*) Why have you sent him away?

MABEL. I haven't. He just went.

SIR HARRY. Did I drive him away?

MABEL. No; he was going before you came.

SIR HARRY. I read the note you stuck in the tree.

MABEL. (*calmly*) Did you?

SIR HARRY. Have you been having a *very* serious talk?

MABEL. Very. Sir Harry, do all girls hate themselves as much as I hate myself?

SIR HARRY. Do you hate yourself?

MABEL. Awfully! So would you if you knew what I've done.

SIR HARRY. Should I? (*he comes a little towards her*) Tell me what you've done.

MABEL. (*slowly*) I'm afraid I've been flirting with Jack.

SIR HARRY. Have you?

MABEL. Yes, I think I must have been. I didn't mean to. I didn't know it was flirting, he says it was, and I expect he knows more about it than I do.

SIR HARRY. I shouldn't wonder.

MABEL. And then quite suddenly it all got serious, and —and so I wrote that note and came out here to—to tell him how sorry I was—and—and to ask him to forgive me. It's awful when a person asks you to marry them and you don't want to, and so have to say no. You've never been through that, have you?

SIR HARRY. Almost; you see I've twenty thousand a year.

MABEL. (*sitting up and facing him*) You mean—oh, how horrid for you! What fools women are—as if money mattered! (*she lies back again*) That's what made Jack so angry just now. He said I wouldn't marry him because he was poor. Why, one couldn't help marrying a man if one loved him, however poor he was, could one?

SIR HARRY. Poverty is a blessing sometimes.

MABEL. (*suddenly*) Oh, Sir Harry—Sir Harry—why is there such a thing as life? I wish to goodness I was a beetle!

SIR HARRY. (*smiling down at her*) What would you gain?

MABEL. (*wearily*) Nothing, I suppose—even beetles get trodden on at the finish. (*a pause, then she looks up at him suddenly, and says*) Did it strike you that I'd been flirting with Jack?

SIR HARRY. I've never seen you together.

MABEL. Haven't you? Oh, I suppose you haven't—but does it strike you as likely?

SIR HARRY. No.

MABEL. I'm sure I haven't been. Jack must have misunderstood me. Why, I've known Jack since he was a little boy. (*she sighs sentimentally*) Poor old Jack!

SIR HARRY. Poor old Jack!

MABEL. I hope it won't prevent our remaining friends.

SIR HARRY. I hope not.

MABEL. Well, I can't help it if it does, can I? Just fancy what it would be to marry any one one didn't love.

SIR HARRY. You talk very glibly of love. What do you know about it?

MABEL. Nothing. I only dream.

SIR HARRY. You have dreamt of love—tell me what "love" seems to you.

MABEL. (*a little at a loss*) Oh—a man——

SIR HARRY. Naturally.

MABEL. And, if you love him—it—means that—that you love him—that you—that you—oh—that you're able to be your real self when you are with him. That you—oh, I don't think I know really, anyhow, I can't put it into words. (*she turns on her shoulder, and looks up at him*) *You* tell *me* what *you* mean by "love."

SIR HARRY. When I was about your age, I think I must have had the same ideas about love that you have.

MABEL. You can't tell what ideas I have, because I couldn't think of the words to put them in, and tell you.

SIR HARRY. It doesn't want words to tell what your ideas of love are. He's a fairy prince. (*she makes an amused grimace to herself, then says sentimentally*)

MABEL. I shouldn't care if he was a beggar, so long as he was Love.

SIR HARRY. Wouldn't you really! (*then he moves towards her, with a laugh of delight*) Oh, what a treat it is to talk to you!

MABEL. You're making fun of me.

SIR HARRY. I'm not. I'm in deadly earnest. You've no idea what a treat it is to meet some one who wouldn't care a hang if you were a pauper. Now look here, let you and I be thoroughly ourselves and have a talk.

MABEL. (*falling into his mood at once*) Oh, if one

could always be oneself wouldn't it be splendid? But there are so few people who'd understand.

SIR HARRY. *I'd* understand.

MABEL. Yes, I think you would.

SIR HARRY. Then if you think that, you know I—I'm worth making a friend of.

MABEL. Yes, I know that too.

SIR HARRY. Then why have you avoided me so steadily these last ten days, won't you tell me? You can trust me. Remember we're both being thoroughly ourselves, so nothing we say matters. Why have you avoided me?

MABEL. Because (*very slowly*) I've got a friend—a girl friend—who, when she heard we were coming down to stay here, said it was "clever" of me—as you were a great catch.

SIR HARRY. (*with disgust*) Isn't it like them? Oh, how I hate my friends!

MABEL. So do I. That one especially.

SIR HARRY. And that's why you've——

MABEL. That's why. (*a pause*) Isn't it awful for you?

SIR HARRY. What?

MABEL. Being such a catch.

SIR HARRY. I've not been caught yet.

MABEL. You will be some day.

SIR HARRY. I keep my eyes open.

MABEL. What's the good of that? Love's eyes may be open, but Love is blind.

SIR HARRY. (*gently*) Not always. (*she rises and walks slowly to the centre and stands staring at the fairy ring. He watches her*)

MABEL. Do you know what that is?

SIR HARRY. What?

MABEL. (*pointing*) That.

SIR HARRY. That circle of pale grass?

MABEL. Yes.

SIR HARRY. (*watching her*) Bad turf, of course.

MABEL. No. (*very gravely*) That's the fairies' ring.

SIR HARRY. Is it really?

MABEL. Yes, really. And—they come here when the wicked people in the world are asleep, and solemnly dance round and round.

SIR HARRY. (*anxiously*) Do—do you like to believe that?

MABEL. (*gravely*) Yes.

SIR HARRY. Oh, Mabel, so do I. (*he seizes her hands and laughs delightedly*) I love to believe those things, they make life beautiful—what—what—oh, what a dear you are!

MABEL. Don't be foolish, Harry!

SIR HARRY. I—I can't help it. Tell me more about the fairies.

MABEL. You wouldn't care to hear.

SIR HARRY. Wouldn't care? Why—why—look here—I'll tell you something. Before you came I brought Uncle Jo here, and I told him all about 'em—and he didn't care a bit—he kept on reading his stuffy paper all about beastly money and—I told him the fairies wouldn't like it, but he went on just the same. Oh, I'm so glad we've had this talk—we might have been years before we got to know each other as well as we do now. (*the bell of the old church clock is heard faintly in the distance*)

MABEL. Half-past one. Oh, I must go.

SIR HARRY. Not yet. Oh, don't go yet. What does time matter? We've all our lives before us.

MABEL. You can do as you please. I can't. I'm only a girl—and stern duty——

SIR HARRY. Stern duty says stay here. Why, all our future may be at stake—we're here in the fairies' ring. (*she tries to move her hands from his*) No—no—don't—not yet. I—I've got a heap to say. You were talking of love just now—wondering—we both were—what it was. I'll tell you what it is—it's what I've got for you.

MABEL. Don't—don't——

SIR HARRY. I must. It—it isn't the stuff they write about in books—it's just "love." Mabel, we've both got to live our lives, and—oh, it's so hard to live one's life effectively alone, but if you'll take pity on me, join hands with me forever as we've joined hands now, what a chance we'd have, wouldn't we? Why, we could go back into the wilderness with perfect faith, trust and confidence—we could stand shoulder to shoulder and go through with everything without a fear. You're real—I'm real at last. Will you have me, Mabel, will you have me? (*then, with a cry, she flings herself from him, and throws herself sobbing upon the grass*)

MABEL. No—no—oh, don't! No! No!

SIR HARRY. (*going to her and kneeling in great distress*) My dear! My dear!

MABEL. Oh, don't! don't—go away!—I didn't think—I didn't mean——

SIR HARRY. Hush, dear, hush! Why, my little one—what is there so terrible in knowing that there is some one ready and willing to lay down his life for you? (*a long pause. She gets up and moves away, controlling herself*)

MABEL. I—I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be a fool. (*then she turns to him, and they look long into each other's eyes—till swiftly she flings out her arms to him with a cry—*

*half sob, half laugh*) Oh, Harry, Harry, if you were starving I'd marry you to-morrow.

SIR HARRY. (*very gravely*) You'll marry me this day month?

MABEL. Don't ask me to—oh, please don't ask me to. (*and he slowly draws her to him and kisses her. She stands passive and submissive, and as he releases her she sinks again to the ground and buries her face in her hands*)

SIR HARRY. (*after a pause, raises her very tenderly—holds her at arm's length, looking at her proudly*) My wife! (*then he whispers, bending towards her*) What have you got to say?

MABEL. (*slowly*) Nothing — nothing at all, except that—(*with a little sob*) I—I'm very tired.

SIR HARRY. (*tenderly*) Poor dear. (*he puts his arm round her. They turn to go. As they reach the opening in the trees he stops and looks down*) A violet!

MABEL. (*quickly*) Don't—don't pick that.

SIR HARRY. (*looking up at her*) I wasn't going to, really. (*he smiles happily*) Oh, isn't it all good? (*then he lifts his head and stands for a moment listening*) Hush, come away. (*they back off behind the tree as the golden heads appear through the bushes and the twins solemnly toddle to the fairy ring and contemplate it gravely*)

HAROLD. They've etted up the yaddick. I knowed they was hungry.

CURTAIN.

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## ACT III.

### THE DAY.

SCENE.—*A very comfortable home room, half library, half drawing-room. A big fire burning. In front of it, in a big arm-chair,* SIR HARRY *lying reading a book. At a table not far off* MABEL *sitting working. The curtain rises and then a long silence, no movement.*

SIR HARRY. (*suddenly looking up from his book*) Sweetheart!

MABEL. (*quietly*) Yes?

SIR HARRY. Edith and Hugh are coming in about nine, they're in a fix over some business or other.

MABEL. Poor Edith!

SIR HARRY. Poor *me!* I'll never be a trustee again, as long as I live. (*he goes on reading. Another long*

*pause. She rises and comes and stands beside him—puts her hand on his head. He puts his hand up and takes hers*)

SIR HARRY. (*softly*) Dear old sweet! I feel awfully dozy—play something. (MABEL *goes to piano and plays, and* SIR HARRY *continues dreamily*) Life's a beautiful thing when it goes straight, don't you think so?

MABEL. Beautiful. (*she leaves the piano and comes down and sits on the floor beside him; with one hand he strokes her hair, the other holds up his book. He goes on reading*)

MABEL. You've taught me such a lot, Harry.

SIR HARRY. Have I?

MABEL. There's such a lot in you, I don't understand—but—but I'm trying, Harry.

SIR HARRY. Don't worry, it's not worth it. I'm glad you told me to read this book, it's jolly good. (*another long pause; he reads, and she stares at the fire*)

MABEL. I'm awfully happy, and I know I don't deserve to be.

SIR HARRY. (*reading*) Who does, if you don't?

MABEL. I don't know; but I know I don't. (*a pause*) Harry, put down that stuffy book, and talk to me—I—I want to say heaps of things.

SIR HARRY. Oh, my dear, I'm at such an interesting part. She's just discovered that her mother drinks, and it's upset her fearfully. (*he chucks the book away*) What do you want to say, old sober-sides?

MABEL. Lots of things.

SIR HARRY. Fire away. (*a pause.* MABEL *stares into the fire*)

MABEL. Do lies really matter?

SIR HARRY. I don't like lies—but I'm rather old-fashioned.

MABEL. Aren't they all right if they're in what turns out to be a good cause?

SIR HARRY. I'm afraid lies are rather a matter of temperament.

MABEL. (*thoughtfully*) A good cause! Why did I say that? How is one to know if it's a good cause? What's a good cause to-day seems a bad cause to-morrow.

SIR HARRY. Um!

MABEL. Don't say um. Now, suppose a person who didn't know anything about anything was shown something she didn't want, and was made to believe that that something that she didn't want was what she ought to have, and so she set to work and got it. Well, when she's got it, she finds out that it *is* what she wanted, that she couldn't possibly live without it; ought she then to tell what she got, that she really didn't want it when she was getting it, or ought she just to be content because she's got it?

SIR HARRY. (*gravely turns and looks at her*) Mabel, will you kindly ring the bell?

MABEL. Why?

SIR HARRY. I want to send for two doctors, and probably a strait-jacket. My brain has given way. (*she rises and he bursts out laughing*) Why, you silly old girl—what on earth are you driving at?

MABEL. Nothing. (*lightly*) I thought I had a problem to solve, but it doesn't seem to pan out. What time is Edith coming?

SIR HARRY. Not yet. Come back. I didn't mean to be a brute—what's the problem, old lady? (*she doesn't move till he says very tenderly*) Won't you come? (*she comes back and sits on the floor beside him*) That's right. Now then, say it all over again right from the beginning, and we'll get it straight.

MABEL. No. (*she makes herself comfortable*) It's only that I know of something that happened once that *began* all wrong—but turned out all right. Well, is it right going on being all right when one person in it knows that it wouldn't be all right if the other people in it knew that when it began it was all wrong?

SIR HARRY. My sweetheart, I don't want to appear stupid, but would you mind writing it down? (*a pause—she looks at him—then she bends over and kisses him—rising and leaving her hand resting on his head*)

MABEL. It's awfully hard to be—to be—(*she falters*) to be so—happy—it makes things difficult! (*then suddenly changing her tone and conversation*) Harry dear, you're getting very thin on the top.

SIR HARRY. That's occurred since Thursday—it was Thursday your mother came to stay, wasn't it?

MABEL. (*with a sigh*) Oh, yes, it was Thursday.

SIR HARRY. There's a lot of good in your mother—misdirected—but good.

MABEL. Misdirected, but good. It's awfully funny to watch your mother and my mother together.

SIR HARRY. I'm afraid they don't hit it off.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON *enters.*

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. How tiresome children are!

SIR HARRY. Your children, never.

MABEL. Are they in bed?

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. At last.

SIR HARRY. When are you going out?

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. Shortly before nine. The carriage *is* ordered.

SIR HARRY. Oh, all right.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. Mabel, it distresses me very much to see you in those dowdy frocks.

MABEL. I'm sorry they're dowdy.

SIR HARRY. They're not, they're beautiful. What on earth would you have her wear?

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. I hate people to be eccentric. It's all very well for artists and that class of people; they live by it, but it's ridiculous for a married woman, with an assured position, to dress like a schoolgirl with nothing at all.

SIR HARRY. Does she dress like a schoolgirl? I think she looks perfect.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. People who didn't know might think you'd married a bank clerk.

SIR HARRY. Why—what——

MABEL. I dress as I please, mamma—Harry likes it. I like it. I don't think other people matter.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. As a girl you were very fond of jewels, and rightly; you always made the best of yourself. I'm sure you carried my amethysts superbly. Now, your extreme simplicity isn't even mitigated by a bangle. I know it isn't because you haven't got jewels, because while you were engaged Harry was most lavish.

SIR HARRY. By Jove, it's true. I confess I never noticed it, but you have never worn any of those things, have you, Mab?

MABEL. (*slowly*) Not yet——

SIR HARRY. Why? Don't you like them? You did then.

MABEL. Yes, I did then. One of these fine days, when I've justified my existence, I'll make the best of myself again, and burst on you, in all my splendor, or rather your splendor; till then, I'll just be myself, if you don't mind, mamma.

SIR HARRY. (*looks at her curiously*) Is anything the matter?

MABEL. (*quietly*) No, Harry—no—no—only mamma rubs me the wrong way—and—and I'm rather a cat this evening.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. (*looking at her critically*) Who makes those dreadful gowns?

MABEL. I make these dreadful gowns.

SIR HARRY. (*surprised*) You do—gracious—why?

MABEL. I always used to at home—and—I didn't see why I should change.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. You used to hate it then.

MABEL. Well, I like it now.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. Of course, marriage makes a difference to a girl, but it has no right to make such a difference as that.

MABEL. Lots of things make a difference that have no right to make a difference.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. I call it a little ungracious to Harry. He'd naturally like you to be smartly gowned—but no—you make yourself a—I can only call it a pinafore—I don't mind that, but you wear it—that's the mistake.

MABEL. That will do, mamma, suppose you keep quite still and read your paper till the carriage is round. I'm feeling a little aggressive this evening.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. You always were an odd child, Mab.

SIR HARRY. That is her chief charm. Bless you, my sweetheart. (*and he, as he passes, takes her hand and presses it lovingly. She sighs, goes to the fire and sits down*) I heard the bell, it's the Graemes, I expect. I'll go down, we'd better have our chat in the study. We shan't be long, dear. I'll bring 'em up before they go.

MABEL. Very well!

SIR HARRY. By the way, where's mother?

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. (*with an aggressive sniff*) She retired to her room immediately after dinner to write letters—she said good-night to me as she felt they would occupy her until I went to the Gordons'.

SIR HARRY. (*apologetically*) I'm sure she didn't mean it that way.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. (*blandly*) What way?

MABEL. (*aside to* SIR HARRY) Be quiet—mamma never sees your mother's meanings.

SIR HARRY. Heavens! I nearly explained 'em! (*he lightly touches his wife's cheek and goes down to the study*)

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. I find Harry's mother a very difficult old woman to entertain. I suppose at her age the intellect does become dim.

MABEL. I daresay! (*a long pause.* MABEL *bends over her work, looking up now and then in thought at the fire*)

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. I see great changes in people. (*pause*) You are not nearly as chatty and light-hearted as you used to be.

MABEL. Really!

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. I suppose that's always the way when one has everything one wants.

MABEL. And knows all the time one doesn't deserve it!

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. Unless you have been singularly secretive you have done nothing to make you unworthy of anything.

MABEL. Haven't I? (*a pause*) I've lied, I've cheated, I've tricked a man!

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. (*in horror*) What man?

MABEL. I've only met one man in my life, and I suppose that's the reason I cheated him.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. Who is he, pray?

MABEL. (*rising suddenly and tossing her work away*) Does it matter? I think I'd better ring. I'm sure the carriage must be there by now.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. (*looking at watch*) No, ten minutes yet. Kindly explain this to me, Mabel. You're my daughter, and—it's my duty to see that you're happy.

MABEL. I have everything that money can buy and other things besides—so it's obvious that I'm perfectly happy.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. Your manner makes me positively cold.

MABEL. I really wouldn't alter your temperature on my account, mamma—it can't help me.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. But I must positively interfere.

MABEL. (*quietly*) No, please. Nobody shall ever interfere in my life's affairs again. You've done your duty, you started me carefully—on the "broad, straight road that leadeth to"—well, you know the Bible backwards, so I needn't tell you where it leads.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. (*horrified*) Mabel!

MABEL. Don't worry. I've stopped walking. I'm standing still, thinking of a way out.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. I haven't the remotest idea what you're talking about, but I almost fancy that you're having a dig at me.

MABEL. No, I think I'm "having a dig," as you call it, at myself.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. Why—why—what have you done?

MABEL. (*rising*) What have I done? I've been a fraud. You want to know the reason of many things—well, here it is—quite quietly. When I think of how we schemed to trap him into this marriage—it gets on my nerves—it—it makes me sick—that's all—it makes me sick—and—it may likewise interest you to know that I have made up my mind to get straight. I'm going to tell him, mamma. I'm going to tell him everything. I shall never be honestly happy till I do.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. (*aghast*) You'll never be happy *if* you do.

MABEL. Do you really think that? (*she stares at her mother, then flings from her in despair*) Oh! what's the use of asking you what you really think—you never have thought—you never will.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. What are you going to tell him?

MABEL. Everything that he should have known before he married me.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. You daren't do it, no woman would be such a fool.

MABEL. I would. (*the clock strikes*)

SERVANT *enters.*

SERVANT. The carriage is at the door, m'm.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. Thank you. (*exit* SERVANT) Mabel, there are times when I should like to shake you.

MABEL. I daresay.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. If you do—this—this wicked thing—I—I will positively never darken your doors again!

MABEL. I may not have a door to darken. You'd better get your wraps, mamma, Harry hates the horses to be kept waiting.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. I—I'm going.

MABEL. I wonder what he'll say when I repeat to him our conversation as to the relative values of himself and old Worburn as investments. You recommended Worburn very highly, you may remember. Of course he does own half Park Lane.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. You—wicked—wicked woman!

MABEL. I'm glad you couldn't convince me—I'm glad I drew the line at Worburn. Good-night, mamma dear, I hope you'll have a cheery evening.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. (*after a pause, during which she glares at her daughter, who is still playing*) I—I can't trust myself to speak to you to-night, I will come to your room in the morning. (*and she goes out.* MABEL *plays on and on, till at length she leans her head forward on the music-rest and cries quietly, then after a time she dries her eyes, gets up and walks to the window, is going to open the shutters, suddenly changes her mind, goes quickly back to the piano and dashes into a mad galiop. The* SERVANT *announces* "Mr. Kennerly")

MABEL. (*starts up in surprise*) Jack—back again? (*and* JACK KENNERLEY *enters*) Why—you are a surprise. When did you get back?

JACK. This morning.

MABEL. And came straight here to see us—that's nice of you.

JACK. Of course I came straight here—what else should I do?

MABEL. Wasn't your mother glad you weren't killed?

JACK. I hope so. (*a pause.* MABEL *looks at him with a smile, then draws in a long breath and almost laughs*)

MABEL. How funny to look at you, Jack—and—think back. I'm glad you've come—because you've come in the nick of time—you—the only person in the world who knows what I really am.

JACK. (*looking at her curiously*) What do you mean by that?

MABEL. You remind me of everything.

JACK. You only remind me of yourself.

MABEL. (*meeting his glance*) How?

JACK. Memories.

MABEL. Have you memories?

JACK. Yes—one must live.

MABEL. Life's easier without them.

JACK. Life wouldn't be worth having without them.

MABEL. I don't think we look at life from the same point of view. (*she moves away to the piano and plays—after a pause he goes to the other side of the piano and leans on it watching her, then he says*)

JACK. Well, Mab!

MABEL. (*not looking up*) Well, Jack!

JACK. Lady Mabel Milanor.

MABEL. Lady Mabel Milanor.

JACK. Like to come to the Aquarium?

MABEL. No, thank you.

JACK. Like to steal a tea in Bond Street?

MABEL. No, thank you.

JACK. Bored?

MABEL. Bored—no. I read about your being wounded.

JACK. Oh!

MABEL. Were you pleased?

JACK. It was all beastly uncomfortable.

MABEL. Glad to be back?

JACK. Very! Glad to see you again, Mab.

MABEL. That's very nice of you.

JACK. I—I've often thought of how—and—and where we should meet again.

MABEL. Have you?

JACK. You remember you told me I was to dine with you often to—to cheer you up?

MABEL. Yes, I remember.

JACK. Perhaps you don't want cheering up!

MABEL. I don't—in the sense that I thought I should have wanted it then. You're looking very brown and well, Jack.

JACK. I'm splendid—and—and—Mab, marriage hasn't spoilt you—you—you look ripping!

MABEL. (*pleased*) Do I?

JACK. Where is your lord and master?

MABEL. (*smiling*) My lord and master is with Mrs. Hugh and her husband in the study.

JACK. The king was in his counting-house counting out his money—the queen was—Mab, I'm awfully glad to see you again—aren't you glad to see me?

MABEL. Of course I am, Jack.

JACK. Then shake hands with me properly.

MABEL. (*looks at him*) I did. (*he drops his hand a little dashed. Another pause, she still playing, he watching her*)

JACK. Well—tell me things.

MABEL. What sort of things?

JACK. I haven't seen you since your marriage.

MABEL. No.

JACK. Well?

MABEL. Well—what?

JACK. Are you satisfied? Has the scheme worked well?

MABEL. Yes, thank you, very well.

JACK. You've been married—how long is it?

MABEL. Long enough.

JACK. Already?

MABEL. I don't mean it that way. (*a pause*)

JACK. And you are perfectly happy?

MABEL. Oh, no, I'm not.

JACK. Why aren't you?

MABEL. Because I don't deserve to be, I suppose.

JACK. It isn't our fault—it's the rotten state of society. I'm sorry you're not happy—and—yet somehow I'm glad.

MABEL. That's friendly of you.

JACK. I can't help it—I always said what I meant, to you. (*going nearer her*) Mab, it's been awful out there, thinking of you as—as some one else's wife.

MABEL. (*looking up at him swiftly*) What?—(*a pause*) Oh—really—has it?

JACK. I see what a fool I made of myself that day.

MABEL. Do you?—that's a good thing. (*a pause*)

JACK. Are you fearfully busy?

MABEL. What do you mean?

JACK. I mean, can you get out—away at all—can we have—(*he laughs a little awkwardly*) Well—there's Bond Street, and the Aquarium, you know.

MABEL. I think I've passed that, Jack, I've been learning things.

JACK. Well—now take a holiday—get away from all "learning," let's have a day out—shake a loose leg.

MABEL. I tell you, I've been learning things. (*she looks at him*) What a child you are, Jack! you're as ignorant as mother.

JACK. (*blankly*) What's happened?

MABEL. The unforeseen.

JACK. Don't be a sphinx, Mab, it doesn't suit you.

MABEL. Don't be inquisitive, Jack, you're not a woman.

JACK. I'm glad of that.

MABEL. Oh, women needn't have a bad time if they choose to be honest.

JACK. Marriage has changed you.

MABEL. Marriage has taught me a great deal.

JACK. What?

MABEL. That there are a great many fools in the world.

JACK. All of them husbands? (*she stops in her playing and again looks up at him, then says with half a smile*)

MABEL. No—not all of them.

JACK. You mean that you think I'm a fool too?

MABEL. Sometimes.

JACK. So do I, but one lives to repent one's folly. Do you remember that day in the woods, the day you got engaged?

MABEL. I remember.

JACK. I was a fool that day, and I've never ceased to regret it.

MABEL. What do you regret?

JACK. A lost opportunity. I loved you—you—you loved me and—and you would have been my wife now and not his. I've cursed myself for that folly often.

MABEL. How odd! I've blessed you for your wisdom.

JACK. People have no right to be wise when love is at stake. I thought I was doing the wise thing for you when I tried to kill our love.

MABEL. (*smiles*) Poor old Jack!

JACK. But life is a poor thing without it, isn't it, Mab? Do you remember telling me you didn't believe in it?

MABEL. Yes!

JACK. But you were wrong, weren't you?

MABEL. Yes, I was wrong.

JACK. All the riches in the world mean nothing alongside of love.

MABEL. Nothing at all.

JACK. I've dreamed of this talk with you often and often, while I've been away. And now—here we are, and —and it's real—and I can hardly believe it. Mab, you're not as glad to see me as I thought you'd be.

MABEL. You're so different—why—you—you're almost a stranger, Jack.

JACK. (*shortly*) I'm not changed.

MABEL. Aren't you really? Then if you remember the last time we had a serious talk together—you gently but firmly declined to marry me, so what do you expect me to do now that we meet again—fall into your arms and sob?

JACK. Well, not exactly.

MABEL. You're a very amusing boy, Jack. How long does it take a soldier to grow up and be a man?

JACK. What do you mean?

MABEL. I mean how long does it take some men to learn common sense?

JACK. Common sense is a curse. Common sense made me give you up. Common sense made you marry Milanor.

MABEL. And still you consider it a curse? Did you fall in love with any one on the steamer?

JACK. (*angrily*) You know I didn't.

MABEL. (*surprised*) How do I?

JACK. You know there's only one woman in the world I ever think of.

MABEL. (*looks up at him with a smile*) Do you mean me?

JACK. (*shortly*) Yes. (*she rises and comes down to him*)

MABEL. Jack, you and I have known each other since we were little children. (*she holds out her hand, and leads him to arm-chair by fire. Sits him down in it, puts a cushion for his head, then sits opposite to him—a pause*) Now, say that over again, quite slowly. There is only one woman in the world you ever think of.

JACK. There is only one woman in the world I ever think of.

MABEL. And that woman is me?

JACK. You.

MABEL. What do you think of me? How do you think of me?

JACK. Do you want to know?

MABEL. Of course I want to know. Go on. I must understand this very thoroughly.

JACK. You—well, I don't quite see what you're driving at.

MABEL. You know me very well—and I want to know how you think of me. I want to see how we stand. When you think of me, what do you think of me as? As I was that day when I stole off with you to the Aquarium? Is that how you think of me?

JACK. No.

MABEL. As I am now—married to Harry? Is that how you think of me?

JACK. No.

MABEL. As the sly, scheming, contemptible husband-hunter, who laughed at love, and all the real beauty of life, because she didn't understand it?

JACK. No, indeed.

MABEL. How then?

JACK. I think of the girl I kissed, that day on the mounds, by the fairy ring.

MABEL. I see. (*a long pause*) Why do you think of that?

JACK. Because I can't forget it. Can you?

MABEL. No. (*she gets serious, he comes to her and takes her hands*)

JACK. Mabel, why is it we can't forget? (*she withdraws her hands and puts them behind her*)

MABEL. Would you like to know?

JACK. I do know.

MABEL. Well! (*he moves towards her—she checks him*) No, thank you, sit down and tell me your view of the matter, and then I'll try and tell you mine. (*a pause*) Go on, I'm listening.

JACK. You—aren't you making it rather difficult for me, Mab?

MABEL. Difficult, how—we know each other very well, Jack—and—we want to know each other better—don't we?

JACK. Yes.

MABEL. And I've got a sort of a feeling that this is either our last meeting or our first.

JACK. It can't be our first—we met that day.

MABEL. We weren't ourselves. I remember trying to explain that to you then.

JACK. You're wrong—we were ourselves that day—we've not been quite ourselves since.

MABEL. Oh—what's the matter with us now?

JACK. We—we—we're incomplete somehow.

MABEL. Oh, are we—what's to be done about it?

JACK. (*slowly*) Let us get back to where we were that day.

MABEL. (*looking at him a little puzzled*) You know that I am married?

JACK. Married, yes—to him—but I love you.

MABEL. Jack, are all men like you?

JACK. I hope not.

MABEL. So do I. Go on, I'm learning a great deal. You loved me. Out of consideration for my happiness you didn't marry me—you went away, and I married some one else. Now you've come back—and—and you seem to have something on your mind.

JACK. I have.

MABEL. What?

JACK. I can't tell you now.

MABEL. I—I'm much more learned in the world's ways now than I was when you went away, Jack, shall I help you out?—you remember so vividly what I was then—that you feel justified in classifying me now—I suppose I have no right to object.

JACK. I don't understand that.

MABEL. Let's get it clear. Well now—where do we stand? You think that in reality you and I belong to each other, and he's only an interloper.

JACK. Isn't he? If it hadn't been for him we should have been married.

MABEL. Well, we're not married and he's here—a very palpable fact. What do you suggest?—this is very interesting.

JACK. It's impossible to discuss it like this.

MABEL. No, it isn't. Life's a very serious thing, Jack, and it's better to talk things over thoroughly before one tries to alter it to suit oneself. You think we're incomplete?

JACK. We are incomplete.

MABEL. Well, of course that's bad. Now, how are we to complete ourselves? Shall we go away together to-night to Dieppe—Dieppe is the place people usually go to to complete themselves, isn't it?

JACK. I'm only thinking of you. You told me you were unhappy.

MABEL. I know—and—it's very kind of you. How should we put the case to Harry? We could—at least I mean I should, of course, leave a letter behind on my dressing-table to explain that I lack completion, and have left everything I have of value in life that I may seek it. That's right, isn't it—when wives leave their husbands they always leave a letter on their dressing-table, don't they? It's a stiff railway fare, Jack, and I've no money; have you?

JACK. Stop this! I'm serious.

MABEL. Oh, we needn't go—this is his house—we could stay here, but it would be an undignified hole-in-corner business—wouldn't it? Stand up, Jack—look at me. I've suggested the two only possible methods. You're a man of the world—our happiness—our future is at stake—which do you prefer? Well, haven't you got anything to say?

JACK. How can I say anything when you talk like this?

MABEL. How else am I to talk—we want to get this thing straight, don't we? We oughtn't to go on in this dreadfully incomplete state. What are you prepared to do?

JACK. Anything!

MABEL. (*suddenly with a long breath*) Oh, my God, how you show me to myself as I might have been—but for—for him—you are prepared to do anything. Well, there's one thing you've got to do, and I think the sooner you do it the better. Open that door—go quietly downstairs—take your hat off the hat-rack, and sneak out into the street. Either our last meeting or our first, Jack—it's our last.

JACK. You don't mean——

MABEL. (*smiling*) I mean that you are the most contemptible thing I have ever had the misfortune to know,

except myself. I'm not in the least angry with you, but —but do go and get your hat and run back to Africa as quickly as ever you can. You've done lots of very brave things out there I know—now go and do a lot more, and your mother and sisters and all the other people who don't know you will keep on being fearfully proud of you, and you and I who know each other will keep the laugh up our sleeves. Good-bye. (*she goes back to the piano and resumes her playing—he stands staring at her*)

JACK. You won't think like this to-morrow.

MABEL. (*playing*) Won't I?

JACK. (*moving to her almost fiercely*) Do you think I don't know what your life is?

MABEL. I'm sure you don't.

JACK. You don't love your husband, and to you life without love must be hell.

MABEL. Do get your hat.

JACK. Don't play the fool with me. I *know*, you know I know. (*hoarsely*) Six months ago you asked me to marry you. It—it was impossible, and so you married Milanor. You're right, of course, to hide your misery even from me; but I know what things are, and I know what hell must be in your heart.

MABEL. (*still playing*) Harry will be here soon. We might talk the hell in my heart over, mightn't we? Three heads are better than two, even if one's a husband's.

JACK. Perhaps you'd like me to read him this letter.

MABEL. What letter?

JACK. The letter you wrote me the night you got engaged. (*she closes the piano with a snap and rises*)

MABEL. That letter! You've kept it? (JACK *takes it from his pocket*) Give it to me please. (*she reads it. A pause. She turns, looks at* JACK, *smiles sadly, and says with a long drawn breath*) I know what's right now—I'll give it to him to-night—and tell him all.

JACK. You'd give him that letter—you daren't—why, he'd know you——

MABEL. He'd know I didn't love him when I married him—I want him to know it.

JACK. Why?

MABEL. Because I love him now. (*a pause*)

JACK. You love him—you're sure?

MABEL. (*quietly*) I'd sooner starve with him in a cellar than to be the greatest queen in all the world.

JACK. You love him, Mabel? Mabel, don't—don't play the fool about this—is it true?

MABEL. Quite true.

JACK. Then—then (*a very long pause*) I've been a fool —I—I'm very sorry—I beg your pardon.

MABEL. (*with a bitter little laugh that is half a sob*)

We've all been fools—worse than fools, at one time or another in our lives. I don't think you need apologize to me. (*she walks up to the window, and he turns and stares blankly into the fire. At last he says*)

JACK. I—I'm not good at thinking things out—but—but, Mab—if you love him—and he—he loves you—isn't it better to leave things as they are?

MABEL. No!

JACK. (*slowly*) Suppose—he——

MABEL. I know—(*long pause*) I know the risk—but—I'm going straight at last, Jack, you don't know how—how awful the whole of my life has been—I mean when I was quite young—truth didn't seem to matter then. I seem to have lived in an atmosphere of lies—and it was all nice—and easy—and pleasant—but since I've married him—I've somehow begun to understand that it's truth that counts—it's truth that means life, Jack—the other isn't real.

JACK. (*very earnestly*) Mab, don't tell him.

MABEL. (*slowly*) I can't help telling him. I want to know that I can love him without being ashamed.

JACK. I don't know what to say. You must think me an awful cad.

*The door opens and* MRS. GRAEME *enters laughing, followed by her husband and* SIR HARRY.

MRS. GRAEME. You've been a perfect angel, Harry, I don't—— How are you, Mr. Kennerly? Heavens! I thought you were in South Africa.

SIR HARRY. Hallo, Kennerly—how are you? Glad to see you safe and——

JACK. Fairly sound.

SIR HARRY. By gad! What a time you fellows must have had. Jolly glad I wasn't with you. Sorry we were so long, Mab—but Edith's notions of business are nearly as staggering as Hugh's.

HUGH. Oh, you've made it clear now. It's all awfully simple—it was all that "brought forward" business that worried me.

EDITH. Poor dear old Hugh. I'm afraid you've no brain. I notice that men with your style of over-developed mustache seldom have.

SIR HARRY. He's the only husband you've got, so you'd much better make the best of him.

MABEL. (*very brightly*) Never mind, Hugh, I've no brain either.

HUGH. Somehow I don't miss mine.

EDITH. (*to* HUGH) Now if *you'd* married Mabel—and (*turning to* SIR HARRY)—and *you* had married me when I suggested it, how well arranged it would all have been!

SIR HARRY. Beautiful—but see how fond you are of Hugh!

EDITH. (*making a face*) It's quite pathetic, isn't it? Hugh dear, do sit straight—we're all looking at you.

LADY MILANOR *enters, reading a letter.*

SIR HARRY. That the nine o'clock post?

LADY M. Yes. Only one, for me. Yours have gone to your study, Harry. Mine's from Aunt Gertrude, and it actually has something in it. Your cousin Ethel is engaged, Harry.

SIR HARRY. (*springing up*) To Phil Lennox—I'm jolly glad.

LADY M. Phil Lennox! don't be ridiculous. Phil hasn't two brass farthings to rub together.

SIR HARRY. (*astonished*) Then who else?

LADY M. To Worburn, the great brewer.

SIR HARRY. (*horrified*) Worburn! *The* Worburn?

LADY M. There is only one Worburn.

SIR HARRY. But she was in love with young Phil Lennox!

LADY M. That didn't count.

SIR HARRY. What do you mean?—engaged to Worburn!—it—it can't be true.

LADY M. It is. All those girls have been lucky—haven't they?—it's extraordinary.

HUGH. How have they been lucky?

EDITH. In marrying so well.

HUGH. Is it lucky to marry that brute Worburn?

EDITH. It's lucky to be in control of that brute's millions.

SIR HARRY. (*who has been standing dumfounded*) Ethel, poor little Ethel!—who forced her into that shame? (MABEL *listens, and watches her husband intently during this*)

LADY MILANOR. Forced her? Shame? Harry, you've been at that poetry again. Why, she won him in the teeth of the opposition of all the marriageable girls in the county.

SIR HARRY. (*breaking out almost passionately*) I call it damnable; and there's something rotten in the life and morality of a country that countenances such things.

LADY MILANOR. My dear boy——

SIR HARRY. There is—and I repeat it's damnable! Ethel—one of the sweetest, prettiest, happiest little fairy children that ever sent up the sunshine of her laugh to heaven—to be sold to an old brute like that.

LADY MILANOR. Harry!

SIR HARRY. I mean it, it makes my blood boil.

LADY MILANOR. She did it of her own free will.

EDITH. I saw the way the land lay at Henley—I thought she'd pull it off—she was playing him beautifully.

SIR HARRY. You mean to say Ethel——

LADY MILANOR. How is Ethel different from all other marriageable girls?

SIR HARRY. If she did this willingly—then I hope to God she *is* different from other girls.

LADY MILANOR. Rubbish!

SIR HARRY. (*fiercely*) I tell you that a woman who marries a man for his money or position is a—is a—well, it's a difficult thing to discuss this subject in a drawing-room, but you know what I mean. (JACK KENNERLY *is standing with his back to the fire.* MABEL *is standing by the piano. As* SIR HARRY *says this she turns with a sad little smile and meets* JACK'S *look*)

EDITH. I think your views are absurd.

SIR HARRY. Merely because you won't look at the matter fairly.

EDITH. According to you there isn't an honest woman in the world.

SIR HARRY. Rubbish—there are thousands.

EDITH. But they cease to be when they marry—that's so odd.

SIR HARRY. They don't when they marry men they love.

EDITH. How many women have you met who married men they loved?

SIR HARRY. Heaps.

EDITH. It would be interesting to hear you name one or two, wouldn't it, Mab?

MABEL. (*turning away with a light laugh*) I've never thought about it.

EDITH. Do name one or two, Harry.

SIR HARRY. Well, there's my mother.

EDITH. Do you bear your son out in his statement, Lady Milanor?

LADY MILANOR. My dear, I was a parson's daughter—the middle one of nine. My father's income never exceeded £240 a year.

EDITH. Are you answered? (SIR HARRY *sits down with a shrug of despair*)

HUGH. (*sitting up and solemnly facing* LADY MILANOR) When you married Sir Robert, with huge rent rolls, it didn't strike you that you were selling yourself, did it, Lady Milanor?

LADY MILANOR. In my young days a girl never thought of such things. My dear man, it's her duty to marry well—she owes it to herself—to her people—and—and to any family of her own that she may happen to have after-

wards. (*she turns to her son*) Take your own case—where would you have been if I hadn't married your father?

EDITH. Bah—men don't understand these things.

SIR HARRY. No—and, thank God, some women don't either. Bless you, Mab. (*he kisses her as she passes him*) We know better—don't we?

MABEL. (*sitting down at the piano—playing softly*) Yes—we know better. (EDITH *watches* MABEL *and is struck by her face*)

SIR HARRY. (*half to himself*) Ethel—poor little Ethel—the dearest little thing—oh, God, it's brutal!

HUGH. (*slowly unfolding himself from his chair*) Well, ye know I don't often talk, but it seems to me it don't matter much. Edie's often told me she didn't give a button for me when we married—but that don't amount to a row of pins, because since that day, don't ye see, I've grown on her—and we jog along in double harness—er—swimmingly, don't we, Edith?

EDITH. Of course we do.

SIR HARRY. Well, all I can say is from the man's point of view, sooner than have been married for my money I'd——

EDITH. (*lightly touching him on the arm*) Change the conversation.

SIR HARRY. (*laughing*) Yes, I'll change the conversation. I beg everybody's pardon, I was getting hot, but (*sadly*) I was very fond of Ethel—look—the mater, having shattered all my faith in her, has calmly gone to sleep.

EDITH. She's wiser than you, Harry. Oh, ever so much wiser than you.

LADY MILANOR. (*rousing herself*) I wasn't asleep, I was just remembering something. (*and she leaves the room hurriedly*)

SIR HARRY. Well, I don't care what any of you say, I stick to my belief, there are real true, happy, honest married people in the world.

HUGH. (*turning suddenly to* JACK) You're jolly silent, Kennerly, what have you got to say about all this?

JACK. (*with a laugh*) I'm not a married man, so I daren't confess to knowing anything about love.

EDITH. Very discreet of you.

JACK. But I do agree with Milanor, there are real true, honest, happy people in the world. I've met two. (*he bows slightly to* SIR HARRY *and* MABEL) Mabel, if you'll forgive me I've got to be off, the mater's rather seedy, and I promised I'd not keep her late, she still waits up for me.

SIR HARRY. (*rising*) I say, now you're back, let's see something of you—can you dine with us to-morrow?

JACK. (*embarrassed*) I should be delighted, but——

MABEL. (*from piano*) Do, Jack—it's only just ourselves.

JACK. Very well—I—I should like to. (*general farewells, and he goes*)

EDITH. Well, we must be moving too, if we're to get to the Argyles to-night. Aren't you two coming?

MABEL. No!

SIR HARRY. We've realized that there's more in life than dining out and spending hours miserably with people you don't care a bit about.

EDITH. What is there?

SIR HARRY. There is home—you go—we've been out so much we're taking a night off the treadmill for a change.

EDITH. Well, it's been awfully sweet of you, Harry, to put us right. If Hugh had only had even a little brain I needn't have worried you. Good-night, dear. (*she kisses* MABEL)

SIR HARRY. You'd better leave the letters, Hugh. I'll go through 'em more thoroughly and report on 'em in the morning.

HUGH. Right you are! (*he puts a lot of loose letters on the table—on top of* MABEL'S *letter to* JACK) Good-bye, old man, and thanks awfully. (SIR HARRY *and* MABEL *move with them to the door.* SIR HARRY *goes downstairs with them, and* MABEL *stands watching for an instant, then moves down to the fire*)

MABEL. "The woman who marries a man for money or position is a——" Oh, why did he say that to-night?

SIR HARRY *re-enters very cheerfully.*

SIR HARRY. Poor old Edith, she does amuse me—mind you, she's really awfully fond of Hugh, and I'm sure they're as happy as kings.

MABEL. Despite the fact that she didn't care for him when she married? (*he has gathered up all the letters* HUGH *left, including* MABEL'S *letter to* JACK)

SIR HARRY. Bah!—she cared for him right enough—that's only her pose.

MABEL. (*slowly*) Harry, there is something I want to tell you.

SIR HARRY. (*looking up in surprise*) To tell me? (UNCLE JO *comes in*)

UNCLE JO. The jabberers gone? (*he makes himself comfortable by the fire*)

SIR HARRY. They have. (*still looking at his wife*) What do you want to tell me?

MABEL. (*glancing at* UNCLE JO) I—by-and-bye—when we are—alone. (*she goes out of the room*)

SIR HARRY. (*docketing the various letters*) Poor little Ethel! I can't get that tragedy out of my mind.

UNCLE JO. What tragedy?

SIR HARRY. Oh, only a suicide.

UNCLE JO. Some one you knew?

SIR HARRY. (*very sadly*) Yes, a dear little girl I knew. (SIR HARRY *is looking through the letters when he stops suddenly and looks up*) Now what the devil has this got to do with Edith?—it's Mab's writing. (*he reads it, then he turns and looks at his uncle, who is smoking placidly staring at the fire, then he slowly reads it again, and after a long pause, he says with a little shake in his voice*) It's—it's a joke. (JO *turns and looks at him, he has the envelope in one hand and the letter in another, and is alternately staring at them*)

UNCLE JO. Hullo!

SIR HARRY. (*lamely*) They're playing a joke on me, listen! (*he reads the letter*) "Dear Jack"—It's to Kennerly, her cousin Jack Kennerly, you know. "Dear Jack, I promised to tell you the result of the hunt—the wheel has come full circle—I am there—we are to be married in February—so, I am to rule in Chesterfield Street, and play Lady Bountiful at Fawn Court. Well, I worked hard for it, and I've got it all. It may amuse you to know that I am thoroughly ashamed of myself, and more miserable than I've ever been in my life—it would be a great relief to tell him all about it, and ask him to kindly buy some one else.—Yours, Mabel. P.S.—Burn this." (*a long pause*)

UNCLE JO. Practical jokes of that sort are very silly.

SIR HARRY. Very silly. (SIR HARRY *sits motionless, staring out in front of him.* UNCLE JO *watches him uneasily*)

UNCLE JO. Who wrote the stuff?

SIR HARRY. She did.

UNCLE JO. I don't believe it—she doesn't play tricks like that.

SIR HARRY. (*quite motionless*) It—it—isn't like her, is it, but—but she has.

UNCLE JO. (*crossing to him*) Let me see. (*he takes it*) Where did you find it?

SIR HARRY. Among Edith's papers—don't say anything about it—we—we'll pretend we haven't read it, and then the laugh will be upon our side, won't it? (UNCLE JO *is turning over the letter, then on the envelope something strikes him*)

UNCLE JO. The Borcambe postmark.

SIR HARRY. I saw.

UNCLE JO. Date, June the second—why, that was the very day——

SIR HARRY. (*very slowly—half to himself*) The very day we met by the fairies' ring—the very day we—she wrote it that night—she—the very day we—— (*then almost*

*fiercely*) No—no—don't let's jump to conclusions—let's think it over—quietly—quite quietly. (*a long pause*) It—it can't be true—it—it isn't possible—why—why—I remember everything she said—and just how she looked when she said it. Why—why—she held out her arms to me—and said—Harry—Harry—if you were starving I'd marry you to-morrow. It—it couldn't have been a lie—she—she wouldn't have lied to me then—like that. Oh, no—it isn't true—of course it isn't true. Where's the letter? (*he rises, picks it up. Then he sinks back into his chair again, and sits silent. Then he whispers—almost to himself*) I remember her last words to him—"I'll write to you—you ought to get the letter in two days"—and—and—is this what she promised to write—— (*a long pause—while he stares at the letter*)

Uncle Jo. How did it get here anyhow?

Sir Harry. He must have brought it back to her to-night. He wanted to marry her—she refused him the day she accepted me, and—and Ethel loved Lennox and married Worburn. "How is Ethel different from other marriageable girls?"—my mother said that. (Uncle Jo *moves a little towards him*) No, no—give me time, Uncle Jo. I—I've got to think this out. (*and he buries his head on his folded arms. There's a long pause, and something very like a sob is heard.* Uncle Jo *goes to him quickly, almost angrily*)

Uncle Jo. Come, come—don't be a fool, man—if she did write it she didn't mean it, and what matter if she did mean it then, she knows a damn sight better now! Come, come, I shouldn't give it another thought if I were you.

Sir Harry. (*lifting a haggard face—says hoarsely*) Seven months of it—how she must loathe me!—Oh, God, what a cur I feel!

Uncle Jo. (*looking at him in amazement*) You! What have you done?

Sir Harry. Robbed her of everything—her youth—her love—her purity—robbed her of heaven and shut her up in hell—oh, why didn't she tell me? I wouldn't have done it—I didn't know—how could I know? Why didn't she tell me—why didn't she tell me?

Uncle Jo. If any one is to blame she is.

Sir Harry. Don't! She was a child—she didn't understand. (*he starts from his chair and walks rapidly to and fro, thinking. Then suddenly he breaks out fiercely again*) I won't believe it—it's humanly impossible—all her life with me can't have been a piece of acting—it can't have been a lie. She couldn't have kept it up, day and night, night and day, for seven months. (*he stops, listening intently, hearing her footfall. Then he turns almost pitifully to his uncle, and whispers*) She's coming—watch

her—watch her—it can't be all a lie. (MABEL *enters quietly, humming softly to herself. The two men appear absorbed, but are in reality watching her. She is looking about her furtively for the letter. She sees it and picks it up.* SIR HARRY, *not looking up, speaks unconcernedly*) What's that?

MABEL. Nothing of importance—an old letter. (*there's a pause*) I—am I in the way?

SIR HARRY. No. (*another pause. Something in his face disturbs her, and she moves towards him*)

MABEL. Harry dear—you're looking so tired. Uncle Jo, don't make him work any more to-night. (*softly*) I'll come back again when he has gone. (*and she goes out*)

SIR HARRY. (*very slowly*) Poor little girl! poor little girl! Did you see? did you see? You heard what she said about the letter, and how she said it. If we hadn't known—we should never have suspected anything. Lies—lies—lies—and I'm the cause of them. I have made truth impossible.

UNCLE JO. I don't see that she's to be pitied.

SIR HARRY. Don't you? If the prospect of marriage with me made her "more miserable than she'd ever been in her life"—what must it be for her now that we're married and she can't escape me night or day?

UNCLE JO. You're making a mountain out of a molehill—girls get accustomed to anything.

SIR HARRY. Not to the kisses of a man they hate.

UNCLE JO. Rubbish! Now, look here, forget all about that damned letter—look at it from a sensible man's point. You wanted her—you've got her—she's made you as happy as a king—and what more can a man expect from a woman?

SIR HARRY. A great deal.

UNCLE JO. It's unreasonable. I'm sure she makes an admirable wife.

SIR HARRY. (*with a passionate outburst, striking the table with his fist*) Makes an admirable wife—what a foul phrase—that's it—she's been an admirable wife; gentle, uncomplaining, submissive, she's laughed when I laughed, sighed when I sighed—danced to me, sung to me—fed me and kept me comfortable—soothed my body—and satisfied my mind. Oh, the bargain has been honestly fulfilled. I give her money and position—she gives up herself, in complete surrender—this has gone on for seven months. Uncle Jo, would you like to speculate how often, during these seven months, a longing has come over her to kill either herself or me?

UNCLE JO. You're talking damn nonsense. Here you are, the pair of you—you've made a beautiful home——

SIR HARRY. (*interrupting*) Oh no—we've never had

a home. It's been a stable for me—a prison for her. (*he rises and goes to the fireplace and rings the bell*)

UNCLE JO. You—you'll think differently in the morning, when you've cooled down.

SIR HARRY. We'll see—I don't think I'm excited—I'm numbed—that's all. (*a pause—he goes back to the table—then he suddenly shudders and drops his head on his hands*) The past comes over me in waves and makes me sick. (*a* MAN SERVANT *enters*) Pack some things for me, will you? —I—I shall be away some days. (MAN SERVANT *bows and goes away again*)

UNCLE JO. You're going?

SIR HARRY. Of course I'm going.

UNCLE JO. Without speaking to her?

SIR HARRY. I—I'll write—I—I couldn't speak to her of this. I couldn't—man, don't you understand, I love her more than anything in all the wide, wide world! (*and with a dry choking sob, he turns his back and walks to the far corner of the room. There's a pause. Then he comes back and resumes his seat at the table.* UNCLE JO *watches him anxiously*)

UNCLE JO. Don't do anything foolish.

SIR HARRY. I won't!

UNCLE JO. What do you mean to do?

SIR HARRY. (*slowly*) Nothing—at least, nothing that matters to anybody except myself. (MABEL *comes in quietly and says reproachfully.*)

MABEL. Oh, Harry—still working! (UNCLE JO *grunts —she goes to the piano and plays softly*)

SIR HARRY. (*to his uncle*) Go—go—I—I'll try and speak to her now. (UNCLE JO *goes quietly out of the room, and* MABEL *plays on*)

MABEL. Harry, I want you to be very gentle with me—it's very difficult to tell you—and—and I don't know if you will be able to understand. (*he is not looking at her, nor she at him*) Do you remember—that day, in Bond Street, saying to me, "Come out of the wilderness into the light"?

SIR HARRY. Yes.

MABEL. I pretended to understand you—it was a lie! (SIR HARRY *looks up startled*) That day in the woods—when you asked me to marry you—and—and I said I'd marry you if you were starving—it—it was the truth, and yet it was half a lie then.

SIR HARRY. (*he turns towards her wearily*) I don't understand!

MABEL. Don't look at me, Harry—you'll never care for me again—after what I've got to tell you—at least I hope some day you will—but—but it's bound to be a long time. (*all the time she plays and he stands by his table listening*) I was told to marry you, I made up my mind to marry

you, and I—I thought it all out. That day by the fairies' ring—when you came I didn't love you, I thought I loved some one else, he—he had kissed me—and I didn't know—but before that I had laid plans to marry you—then when he kissed me—I—I wanted to marry him. That's where I was such a fool, but he wouldn't, so it was all all right—and so I—I married you. This letter, it's to Jack. I wrote it the day we got engaged—it tells how I'd won you—I'd sold myself and that I knew I was a beast—that's all.

SIR HARRY. (*very sadly*) If you'd only told me before!

MABEL. I was a coward and afraid.

SIR HARRY. I would have gone away ages ago, and then it wouldn't have been so bad. (*she looks swiftly at him—appealing. Then her head droops a little. A pause*) Well, it's no good crying over spilt milk—we can't undo the past—but—but—we'll think of the future. (*he turns to her with a look of infinite tenderness*) You're very young—just nineteen, aren't you? It will be better after I've gone away.

MABEL. You'll go away?

SIR HARRY. I'll go to-night.

MABEL. (*shivers a little and turns sadly from him*) I—I thought you would if I told you.

SIR HARRY. Then you do understand me a little?

MABEL. (*looking at him sadly*) A little, yes. (*then she turns from him and sits listless, and there is a silence. At last she asks him almost pitifully*) What shall *I* do?

SIR HARRY. I don't know—what do you want to do?

MABEL. Whatever you wish.

SIR HARRY. (*shrinking*) Don't talk like that—that's finished—you—you're free.

MABEL. (*wistfully*) Won't you let me do what you'd like me to do?

SIR HARRY. (*bitterly*) Don't—don't—our bargain's over—I'm not your owner now.

MABEL. Harry! (*then he breaks out almost fiercely*)

SIR HARRY. Be fair to me! I've spoilt your life, I know—but it wasn't my fault—nobody told me—I loved you. I meant no harm—be fair to me. (*then he stops*) I'm sorry—I didn't mean to break out like that. (*a long pause*) I've thought it all out—there's only one thing to be done. I—I'll go away and—and then, soon, you will be quite free.

MABEL. (*looks at him puzzled*) Free?—I—free of you?—I don't understand.

SIR HARRY. (*with a bitter laugh*) Great happiness takes time to realize.

MABEL. (*shrinking*) Harry!

SIR HARRY. Don't mind what I say—I'm not quite myself. (*he laughs a little*) You see—you—you've hit me

rather hard—and—and I was very fond of you—I've always tried to do my best for you. I'm going to do all I can for you now.

MABEL. How do you help me by going away ?

SIR HARRY. You'll know soon—but afterwards—— (*he turns and faces her*) I don't care who he is, or what he is, he'll never love you as—as I have loved you—good-bye. (*and he turns to leave the room—she rises with a cry*)

MABEL. No, no—not yet—not yet—Harry, you're very hard—my fault—I've made you hard—wait a minute—oh, do wait a minute—I—— (*a pause, he comes down to her*)

SIR HARRY. Well ?

MABEL. When—when you've gone—after a time—time is a wonderful thing, Harry, and—it might even make things seem different to you. If it should and you should remember me—and what we've been to each other—do you think you'd ever ask me to come home ?

SIR HARRY. What do you mean ?

MABEL. Only that I—— (*she falters—he stares at her, then moves quickly towards her*)

SIR HARRY. You said—ask you to come home—home—where ?

MABEL. I've only known one home, that's ours. (*then passionately*) I didn't mean to ask you this—I thought I could be brave—but, oh, it's so hard to be brave. I'm not asking favors of you. I don't want you to be good to me—but, later on when you think of me—and I know you'll have to think of me—think of me as I've been these last few months, because that's me, don't think of me as I was, when we were first engaged, because I—I was different then, I didn't know. (*his eyes on hers—his voice strained with excitement*)

SIR HARRY. You—what are you saying ? What do you mean ?

MABEL. I can't help it—don't be hard on me. Oh, Harry, Harry, let me think that—some day you'll write to me—come to me—send for me—let me come home again.

SIR HARRY. (*tossing back his head with a glad shout*) Great God—you don't know what you've done. (*he rings the bell violently*) You've pulled us out of the fire—my dear—oh, my dear, I was going to make such a fool of myself. (*the* MAN SERVANT *enters, followed by* UNCLE JO) Have you packed ?

SERVANT. Nearly, Sir Harry.

SIR HARRY. Then unpack and be damned to you.

UNCLE JO. (*amazed*) What the——

SIR HARRY. Go away ! Go away !—we don't want you—go away ! (*he holds out his arms to his wife*) My dear. Oh, my dear.

MABEL. Harry ! (*she stands bewildered for an instant —then realizing the truth, she goes to him with a sob*)

SIR HARRY. (*holding her tightly in his arms, half laughing and half crying*) Out of the wilderness into the light at last !

THE END.

# WHEN WE WERE TWENTY-ONE

## Comedy in Four Acts

BY

H. V. ESMOND

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Frank Craven.

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# WHEN WE WERE TWENTY-ONE.

Performed at the Comedy Theatre, London, Sept. 2, 1901.

CHARACTERS.

RICHARD CAREWE.....Mr. Nat Goodwin
SIR HORACE PLUMELY, BART. (commonly called WADDLES).....Mr. Neil O'Brien
COLONEL MILES GRAHAME (the Soldier Man).....
Mr. J. R. Crawford
TERRENCE MCGRATH (the Doctor).....Mr. F. H. Tyler
RICHARD TERRENCE MILES AUDAINE (the Imp.).....
Mr. Arnold Daly
HERBERT CORRIE.....Mr. Fred Tiden
DAVID HIRSCH.....Mr. Bassett Roe
HUGHIE HELMONT.....Mr. Ernest Lawford
WALLIS BRUNDALLL.....Mr. Ivo Dawson
MRS. ERICSON.....Miss Ingram
PHYLLIS (her daughter.....Miss Maxine Elliott
KARA GLYNESK (known as the Firefly).....
Miss Constance Collier
BUDGIE CULPEPPER.....
BABETTE (Kara's Maid).....

# WHEN WE WERE TWENTY-ONE.

## ACT I.

SCENE.—DICK CAREW'S *room in his flat in Clement's Inn. A man's room. Old-fashioned, comfortable chairs, with the leather well-worn. On the* R. *side of the room a big fire-place with fender seat all round it. The wall is nearly entirely book-cases. The hangings are dark red. The over-mantel is old black oak, also the old-fashioned bureau, which is down* L. *against the wall. There is a deep, comfortable Chesterfield sofa above the fire-place, and a comfortable arm-chair below it, facing up stage. There is a door down* R. *of the fire-place, and a door* L. C. *at back, which opens into the hall—showing the hall—hat-racks, coats, etc., and the hall door, which opens on to the staircase of the building. There is a large window opposite the fire-place with a very crooked blind. A card-table is set out between the window and the fire-place, a little* L. *of the centre, below it is a smaller table, with a half-empty, old-fashioned whiskey decanter, five glasses, and numerous syphons of soda-water —both on and under the table. Various ash-trays, pipes, and cigar-ends about—also packs of cards. The room has evidently just been the scene of a card party. The door is open that leads to the hall, and through it comes the sound of men's voices and laughter. A moment after the curtain rises,* MRS. ERICSON *comes in from the door, down* R. *She is a sweet-looking, fragile old lady. She gives a little ejaculation of dismay.*

MRS. E. Oh, my dear—the smoke. Phyllis, dearie, come and help me to open the window.

(PHYLLIS *enters after her mother, and is likewise a little dismayed at the disorder of the room.*)

PHYLL. They *are* having a party, aren't they? Foo! the heat!

MRS. E. Dick would have a fire—and it's June!

PHYLL. (*has helped to open the window and is now trying to straighten the blind*) Dick says a "card-party" wouldn't be anything without a fire. What is the matter with this beastly old blind—it *will* keep crooked?

MRS. E. (*nervously*) My dear—there's something burning.

PHYLL. (*turning excitedly*) Oh, look about—look about, it's Dick's cigar end for a certainty.

(*The two women commence to hunt*)

Here it is—on the oak, *of* course. He is a careless old thing, isn't he? He'd be burnt down regularly if I wasn't here to look after him He dropped one into the drawing-room piano yesterday, and we didn't find it out for a quarter of an hour, and then we couldn't get at it, so we had to spill milk down to put it out, and that isn't the best thing for a piano.

(*The hall-door bell rings, and as* MRS. ERICSON *is close to it, she opens it and—*)

MRS. E. Oh, Mr. Corrie, it's you.

HERBERT. (*a frank, cheerful youth*) Hallo, Mrs. Ericson, Dick sent down to me about an hour ago, to know if I had any cards. I was out, but I got his message when I came in just now, and thought I'd bring 'em up myself. How are you? (*smiling at* PHYLLIS) One pack's nearly new, the two others aren't quite, and, in fact, I don't think any of 'em are perfect. What does this sudden burst of dissipation mean?

PHYLL. (*gravely*) One of the Trinity has got a birthday.

HERBERT. (*with due solemnity*) Ohoh! Which one?

PHYLL. Sir Horace. The little fat one.

HERBERT. Is that the one they call "Waddles"?

PHYLL. Yes.

MRS. E. I do hope that little bed in the box-room will hold him.

PHYLL. Of course it will hold him, mother—he's not so very fat. He's "just comfortable."

HERBERT. He's staying here?

PHYLL. Dick's putting him up for the night, otherwise he'd have had to go early to catch the last train, and as it's *his* birthday, of course that wouldn't have done at all.

HERBERT. (*fanning himself*) I say—you're awfully hot in here.

PHYLL. Dick *would* have a fire.

HERBERT. Where's the Imp?

PHYLL. Oh, the Imp's gone out to have a quiet evening of his own. He's too young to stand the shock of such a revel as this party.

HERBERT. (*chuckles*) H'm! It strikes me that the Imp isn't quite as young as he looks. Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Ericson.

PHYLL. Not at all.

HERBERT. Somehow it's difficult to think of the Imp as an engaged man.

PHYLL. It is very difficult, isn't it?

HERBERT. He's a jolly lucky chap—oh, I beg pardon, I didn't mean that.

PHYLL. Oh, I hope you did, because I quite agree with you.

HERBERT. That's a spiffing dog-cart Dick's given him.

MRS. E. (*turning round aghast*) What?

PHYLL. Dog-cart!

HERBERT. Oh! Didn't you know—er—well, p'raps it was a hired one—only—well—he did rather lead me to suppose that he was its sole proprietor.

(*Sound of pushing back chairs comes mingled with the chatter from the adjoining room.*)

Hallo! I must get.

MRS. E. Stop and see Dick.

HERBERT. Not I—when four old veterans like that get together and have a birthday, they don't want any extraneous juveniles knocking about—give him the cards. I hope the packs are perfect, but I doubt it.

MRS. E. Oh, I don't think it'll matter one or two being gone, nothing ever seems to matter much to Dick.

(HERBERT *laughs, and with a cheery "Good-night" goes out, not closing the hall-door after him.*)

PHYLL. (*gravely*) That's funny about Imp and the dog-cart. I wonder, does Dick know?

MRS. E. I don't expect he knows half that young man is up to behind his back.

PHYLL. (*gravely*) Mother, you mustn't say disrespectful things about the Imp, he's my future husband!

MRS. E. Yes, dear, I know he is—bother the boy! He's left the door open. (*she goes to the outer door, her eye falls on something by the mat*) Goodness! (*she stops and picks up a key*) The latch-key—now who put that under the mat? (*a pause*) Are any of the servants out at this hour? No, they're not. I saw them go to bed ages ago.

PHYLL. I put it there, mother. It's all right—oh, don't look amazed. The Imp asked me to—he's likely to be a little late and he's mislaid his own.

MRS. E. (*puzzled*) But he's gone to his aunt's at——

PHYLL. (*with a little laugh*) Oh, no, he hasn't.

MRS. E. But——

PHYLL. Mother dear, don't be old-fashioned. The Imp isn't a child—he can go to a Music-hall if he likes. Another dirty old damp cigar. (*looking at cigar*) It's Dick's—he chews his ends.

MRS. E. But—Oh, Dick thinks he's gone to his aunt's, and it seems almost like deceiving him.

PHYLL. If the Imp deceives Dick—Dick's only got himself to blame. I think Dick makes himself very ridiculous about the Imp. I don't deceive Dick. I merely push a silly little latch-key under a very dirty mat, that's all. Mother dear, if anybody saw you glaring at me like that, they'd be bound to think I was a monstrosity out of a show. Smooth your face out, and come to bed, there's a dear.

MRS. E. Phyllis, I really don't believe I shall ever be able to understand you.

PHYLL. That's because of the difference in our ages —you're so very young, and I'm so very old.

MRS. E. (*feebly*) Why are you?

PHYLL. (*with a laugh*) Because, if I'm going to be married to the Imp, I shall need to know a great deal.

MRS. E. It's very upsetting.

PHYLL. What is?

MRS. E. Oh, everything. I'm sometimes tempted to think—you won't marry him at all.

PHYLL. I will. I said I would, and everybody was pleased, and so I suppose I was—fearfully—pleased. After all, nothing matters as long as other people are pleased, does it?

MRS. E. It's very nice to please others, if it doesn't worry one.

PHYLL. Well, now could it worry one to be married to such an ideal husband as the Imp?

MRS. E. I suppose not.

PHYLL. (*suddenly*) Come along, mother dear, they're coming. We don't want to be convicted of keeping them tidy.

(*She puts her arm round her mother and hurries her off. The door is flung open, and amid a general babble,* WADDLES *and the* SOLDIER-MAN *stalk in arm-in-arm. The* SOLDIER-MAN *is smoking a large cigar and* WADDLES *is carrying a drink.* WADDLES, *otherwise known as* SIR HORACE PLUMELY, *is a little, round, cherubic man of about 45. The* SOLDIER-MAN, *otherwise known as* COLONEL MILES GRAHAME, *is very tall—very military, bronzed and handsome, a suspicion of grey in his hair.*)

WADDLES. (*with a sigh of content*) Oh, good gracious me—we're having a splendid evening.

S. MAN. It's a very impressive sight to watch you over a dish of plover's eggs, Waddles.

WADDLES. Can't resist 'em—never could—there's something in their shape that appeals to me.

(*The* DOCTOR, *a well set up, genial Irishman of about five and forty, enters with a small spirit-lamp in his hand—lighting his cigar and speaking through the puffs.*)

DOCTOR. Will ye believe it, boys—wid all my flow of eloquence, I can't persuade Master Dick that it's his duty to marry the old lady. What's to be done about it at all—at all?

(DICK *enters laden with cigars and cigarette boxes.*)

DICK. Lazy demons. Leave me to carry everything, as usual.

WADDLES. You're the host—I'm the guest of honour—it's your duty, all of you, to wait on me. Soldier-Man, fetch me more plover's egggs.

S. MAN. Daren't; you'd burst, and I'd be called to the inquest.

DICK. Oh, dear, oh, dear, I haven't laughed as much for years as I have this evening.

DOCTOR. If you'd only propose to the old lady——

DICK. Shut up, or I'll— (*throws cushion at him*)

S. MAN. (*gravely*) Really, ye know, this fire's a damn nuisance.

DOCTOR. It is that. Couldn't ye put it out somehow, Dick?

DICK. (*ruefully staring at it*) It was such a devil of a job to put it *in*.

WADDLES. (*fanning himself*) I must own, I really have felt it a *little* oppressive once or twice.

DICK. (*hopefully*) I vote we don't notice it; it'll be all right then.

S. MAN. Theoretically it may be all right—but practically—phew!

DICK. Let's take our coats off. (*then with a chuckle to the* SOLDIER-MAN) Do you remember the night we took our coats off in Princes' Street, Edinburgh?

S. MAN. Rather. By Gad, what a pasting you gave the brute, Dickie!

DOCTOR. (*with a note of solemn admiration in his voice*) Ah—it's a beautiful fighter ye were in those days, Masther Dick.

(DICK *chuckles.*)

WADDLES. (*sparring at the* DOCTOR) I was a bit useful if I was pushed, wasn't I, Miles?

DOCTOR. Ye were so—but, thank the Lord—ye weren't often pushed.

WADDLES. D'ye remember the day that by my superior agility and address I compelled you to apologise on one knee for winking at my best girl behind my back?

DOCTOR. I have never yet managed to remember what never happened.

DICK. Come, boys. The cards are getting cold.

WADDLES. (*rising quickly and going to table*) That's right! What I say is—is this a card-party, or is it isn't?

DOCTOR. Come along, then.

WADDLES. My luck must turn. I've lost pounds and pounds.

S. MAN. You don't look it, Waddles.

DICK. Leave my little friend's figure alone—who insults him, insults me—Hello! (*then turning with a chuckle to* WADDLES) D'ye remember that night in the Rue Mont Pamane, we upset the claret over one pack of cards—and then sent down to the room underneath——

WADDLES. (*chuckling*) I know, the room with the red blinds.

S. MAN. Ha! Always drawn.

DICK. Yes—and—d'ye remember the message that came back—and then we went down ourselves—we three.

WADDLES. Me first.

DICK. Yes, and I was next, and slipped over those infernal tins.

S. MAN. Gads, yes, I remember.

DICK. And how all the giggling stopped dead when we opened the door.

S. MAN. By George, yes!

(*And all the men sit back, their faces beaming with the memories of that night so long ago. There is a pause.*)

WADDLES. (*breaks it by murmuring with his eyes half closed and a beaming smile on his plump little face*) One of 'em—the fair one—had her hair all down. I remember.

(*Another pause.*)

S. MAN. (*gravely*) Ah! Soft hair it was too, very soft and long—very—very long.

WADDLES. (*sitting up quickly*) Yes, I remember now—you did me out of a nice thing that night with your lanky legs and your bony shoulders. I'm not sure it's diplomacy for a man of my build to be seen about by ladies with a man of yours.

S. MAN. You wern't your present magnificent proportions then, Waddles—you were a slim little freckled, impudent—scaramouch.

WADDLES. I was—I was—oh, I know I was. (*and he beams again with renewed delight*)

DICK. Oh, those days—those nights. What times we used to have.

WADDLES. And will again.

DOCTOR.

DICK.

S. MAN.

(*together*) Rather—one of these fine days.

WADDLES. (*after a pause*) I don't think I was ever *very*, was I?

DICK. Well, I don't know about *very* freckled, was he, Miles?

DOCTOR. Well, he *was* freckled, anyhow.

WADDLES. I don't care if I was. (*he looks cheerfully at the circle round the table—the* SOLDIER-MAN *has begun to deal*) Oh dear, oh dear. We're all just as young as we were then.

(*There is a pause, the three men look up with a wry face.*)

DICK. Just as young.

S. MAN.

DOCTOR.

(*together*) Ahem—just.

WADDLES. (*patting his own bald spot apprehensively*) Well!! almost—anyhow. I fear I'm beginning to lose a little control over my figure, but in some respects I'm sure we're younger, aren't we, Dickie?

DICK. Much younger. Misdeal again, Miles.

DOCTOR. That's the third time. It's the lobster's flown to your head, my poor boy.

S. MAN. (*smiling*) Ah, the young 'uns of to-day don't know how to enjoy life as we knew how to enjoy it. They're all so damned calculatory.

DICK. No such word.

5S. MAN. You know what I mean. We, Dickie, you and I, never stopped in the old days to turn things over in our minds and grow grey over counting the chances of what would or wouldn't happen. We went slap at everything, like the healthy young devils we were.

WADDLES. Are.

ALL. Are, of course.

S. MAN. And if we got our ears boxed—damme—it did us good—and—er—if we *didn't* get our ears boxed—well——

DICK. (*cheerfully, speaking for him*) Damme, that did us good, too.

GENERAL CHORUS. (*cheerfully*) So it did, of course it did.

DOCTOR. Ah, we are a merry Trinity.

WADDLES. (*quickly*) Quadrity! Don't forget *me*, if you please.

S. MAN. Ah, Waddy, you're not an original member—you grew on to it later.

DICK. You did—you plump little parasite.

DOCTOR. It was three years later you threw in yourself on us, Waddy dear.

WADDLES. (*gloomy*) I know it was. But oh, after all these years don't you think it would be more gen-

tlemanly of you three to forget your blessed Trinity, and start friends level?

S. MAN. Damme! I've mis-dealt again.

DOCTOR. It must be the lobster—it couldn't be the wine.

DICK. Here, I'll have a go this time.

S. MAN. (*leaning back in his chair and stretching his long legs*) Remember that night in Boulogne when we——

DICK. (*gravel*) Ought we to discuss that before Waddles—he's very young.

DOCTOR. And very immature.

WADDLES. It is my birthday. I won't keep on being got at, and my glass has been empty for ages.

DICK. (*rising quickly*) My dear Waddy, I'm awfully sorry. I left the drinks in the dining room. You deal on where I left off—oh—where did I leave off—never mind, go on where I did. I don't know, a card or two more or less won't make much difference at this time of night.

DOCTOR. (*counting the cards*) Count your cards, boys.

(*They do so. Then the* DOCTOR *folds his hands across his middle and lets his roving eyes rest on a photograph of* PHYLLIS *that hangs on the wall.*)

(*placidly*) It's a wonderful invention, this photography—sure that's a speaking likeness of the child.

(*The other two, absorbed in counting, merely grunt.*)

She's a beautiful gyurl!

S. MAN. She is.

WADDLES. Beautiful indeed.

DOCTOR. Why did none of us have the chance of meeting such an angel when we were the Imp's age?

S. MAN. Because we'd all have got married, and then none of us would have been here to-night.

WADDLES. (*having counted*) Seven.

S. MAN. And seven here. The Imp's a lucky little chap.

WADDLES. He is so—no, it's eight I have.

DOCTOR. Be—devil the cyards. I can't count for thinking.

WADDLES. It's my belief the Imp will have to let off a lot of steam before he's fit to run in double harness.

(*The two others give grunts of mutual acquiescence. Then there is a pause, broken by—*)

ALL. I wish— (*they stop and each looks at the other*)
DOCTOR. What?

(WADDLES *and the* SOLDIER-MAN *pick up their cards a little sheepishly.*)

S. MAN. Nothing.
DOCTOR. (*looking at them both, quizzically*) It's the same case wid all of us, I'm thinking.
WADDLES. What's that?
S. MAN. I fail to follow.
DOCTOR. (*gravely*) Why, all of us u'd gladly lay down in the mud, and let Miss Phylley dance herself thro' life on our bedabbled corpses.
WADDLES. (*loftily*) Not at all—not at all.
S. MAN. Not I.
DOCTOR. (*shaking his head*) Ye're fooling yourselves, the facts is as I say. Howld yer whist. Here he comes and the whiskey wine.

(DICK *enters with a bottle from Tantalus.*)

DICK. It's nearly empty.
DOCTOR. Nearly empty, it is that an' more. Never mind—when it's finished, we can all go and forage in the barrel. Here are your cards, my son.
DICK. (*sitting down and picking up his cards*) Miles, how the dickens do you keep so tidy? You don't even get tobacco ash on your trousers (*and he brushes himself vigorously with his hands*)
S. MAN. It's constitutional.
DOCTOR. (*looking at his cards*) I propose.
WADDLES. (*looking at his hand*) I pass.
DICK. Half a minute. I haven't looked at my hand. I wish to goodness the Imp were here. I find his advice at cards most invaluable.
DOCTOR. His father was a good card player.
DICK. Card playing's a gift. (*then looking round at the other players*) What's happened?
S. MAN. Proposal over there.
DICK. (*as he laboriously arranges and examines his cards*) Jolly tactful of him to go out to-night, so that we four should be all to ourselves, wasn't it?
WADDLES. Very—we're waiting for you—what do you do?

DICK. Oh, is it me to shout? Oh, I pass—no, I don't —I'll accept you, Doctor.

WADDLES. Come on, we'll down 'em. My lead.

DICK. Hallo, I've only got twelve cards. (*he counts them out*)

S. MAN. It's an imperfect pack—it must be.

DICK. Try another, and deal again.

S. MAN. I'm a bit sick of dealing, somebody else have a go.

DOCTOR. (*cheerfully*) I'll do it. (*and he deals while the others watch him*)

S. MAN. I say, old man—I hear you didn't take that fishing after all.

DICK. No.

S. MAN. Why the dickens didn't you—it's quite the best.

DICK. I daresay, but I came to the conclusion that I couldn't afford it.

S. MAN. Rubbish!

DICK. It's fact.

S. MAN. Then I expect you let the Imp run away with all the spare cash, eh, Master Dick?

(DICK *smiles.*)

DICK. He runs away with a good deal, bless him.

DOCTOR. It's a mistake.

DICK. What is?

WADDLES. You spoil him.

DICK. I don't.

DOCTOR. (*interposing quickly*) Ah, now do let's drop the Imp, and get on with our game. We're the Imps to-night, not 21, any man Jack of us.

(*The others pay no attention to him, and the* SOLDIER-MAN *goes on gravely.*)

S. MAN. I think, Dick, if you'll allow me to say so, you're wrong in letting him run away with the idea that his income is unlimited.

DICK. He's welcome to all I've got—and he knows it.

WADDLES. And doesn't scruple to make use of his knowledge, I'm thinking.

S. MAN. That's all very well, old man—but I don't think you've got more than enough for yourself.

DICK. Oh, I want very little.

WADDLES. Why have you given up your cob, Dickie?

DICK. (*shoving his fingers through his hair*) Oh, I I dunno.

S. MAN. You didn't shoot last year. How was that?

DICK. Er—I dunno.

WADDLES. I do; you think the money is more profitable squandered on the boy.

DICK. Well, p'raps I do.

S. MAN. Rot.

DOCTOR. Not at all.

WADDLES. You spoil him.

S. MAN. Does he know that you're giving up all the fun you used to get out of life, that he may enjoy himself more than's good for him?

DICK. He doesn't, because I'm not.

DOCTOR. You let him have every mortal thing he wants.

DICK. I don't.

WADDLES. If he cried for the moon you'd make an effort to get it for him.

DICK. So would all of you.

WADDLES. It can't be a good training.

DOCTOR. No, indeed it can't.

DICK. Look here, it's all very well to round on me, but—but, under the circumstances, I don't think I've turned the boy out badly.

(WADDLES *shakes his head and groans.*)

I think he's a splendid fellow, if you ask me.

S. MAN. So do I—that's not quite the point.

DICK. Of course, I may have gone wrong in one or two little things——

DOCTOR. Ye've gone wrong on more than one or two little things to my certain knowledge.

DICK. Still I've done my best to turn him out all right. Suppose you three chaps have a go at him now. Every little helps, and I'm jolly sure that out of our united experiences we ought to be able to teach him a thing or two.

WADDLES. (*beamingly*) I'm sure any one of us could instruct him how to have a high old time.

DICK. (*shortly*) That's not what I mean.

DOCTOR. Shut up, Waddles, you're a rake.

(WADDLES *chortles with conscious pride.*)

S. MAN. Now we are on this subject, I should like to know how he does really stand—financially, I mean.

DICK. (*a little embarrassed*) Oh, he's all right that way.

DOCTOR. Let's see, how auld was he when he became our property?

DICK. Two.

S. MAN. And from then till now——

WADDLES. Nineteen years.

S. MAN. He has been your old man of the sea—that is to say—he has lived with you?

(DICK *nods.*)

DOCTOR. And we've each contributed a paltry £25 per annum for the little beggar's maintenance.

WADDLES. And what with tutors for this and tutors for that and sending him to Harrow and buying him books and cricket bats, I don't think that there can be much margin on that hundred a year.

S. MAN. Dickie, as co-guardians with you of that boy —we demand to know—what is his financial position?

DICK. Well, as a matter fact, he's all right. That—er—£100 a year that we've arranged to let him have—I—er—well, as a matter of fact, I've made that a sort of a sinking fund for him—I—I've never touched that. It's been left to accumulate and—er—well, it's about £3000 now.

WADDLES. (*bangs the table*) I thought as much.

DOCTOR. So did I.

S. MAN. Then you have paid for his entire bringing up—ever since he's belonged to us?

DICK. It's been all right. I didn't want the money for myself, and I thought our allowances would be very handy for him in a lump sum when he came of age.

S. MAN. You've done more than was necessary.

WADDLES. Much more than he had any right to expect.

DICK. (*rising quietly*) I don't think so, any one of you in my place would have done just the same.

(*He rises and goes to his desk.*)

He is Charlie's boy—(*a silence falls on the men*) you remember when old Charlie came and told the four of us he meant to be married.

WADDLES. And what a silly ass sort of thing we thought it was then.

DOCTOR. (*shaking his head sadly*) Oh, dear old Charlie—one of the best.

DICK. (*sadly*) One of the best.

(*Another pause—the men's minds drift back into the past.*)

That wedding day.

WADDLES. One of my boots was too tight.

S. MAN. I was best man.

WADDLES. Only because ye looked most showy walking up the aisle.

DICK. Then two years afterwards the coming of the Imp, and the passing away of Mrs. Charlie. Poor old chap, how lonely and desolate it seemed to leave him. Do you remember how we used to watch him from our windows walking up and down that field behind the stables day in, day out, with the Imp huddled up in his arms?

DOCTOR. He was hard hit—poor old son.

WADDLES. He was that.

S. MAN. Broke him up.

DICK. He'd have got out of it, had it not been for his dread of leaving the Imp alone. Do you remember this —(*he goes to the desk and takes out a worn letter and reads*) "Im going, old man—and somehow I don't much care. I've never given much thought to the other side—but anyhow she's there. Dick, I want to speak of my boy. I'm leaving him. I'm helpless. I'm leaving him alone, there is only you, you and the Trinity, boys look after my boy when I'm gone. Make a man of him, make him what you know he ought to be. Make the Trinity proud of him, for their old Charlie's sake, let him step into my place with you all, let him be one of us. I'm leaving him so terribly alone. Oh, for God's sake, Dick, be Father—Mother—be all to him." (DICK *stops and refolds the letter*) And—and—I've done it, boys. I've been father and mother and—and, oh, I've been a damn fool, I daresay—but I've done my best. (*then with a sudden outburst*) Hang it all, so have you, you've all made fools of yourselves about him at one time or another. You—(*he points a scornful finger at the* SOLDIER-MAN) You've swaggered down Piccadilly with him sittting on your shoulders rubbing your top hat the wrong way. I was with you and saw even the cabmen laughing. (*then he turns fiercely on* WADDLES) You—you were caught in a four-wheeler in Pall Mall with a rocking horse on top, a most invidious position for an unmarried man. (*they all laugh*) You laugh at me. Very well—laugh away. I'm a hen with one chicken, I daresay, and a hen with one chicken I'll be to the end of the chapter, but I mean that chicken to be a

bally swan before I go and tell Charlie how we've reared his boy.

(*And very excited he goes across to the bureau and replaces the letter, shutting the drawer with a snap.*)

DOCTOR. Well, well, well—he's a fine ould youngster—but all this has given me the doldrums, Dickie, me son—excursh into the larder, and trot out another jug of whiskey wine.

DICK. I—I—I'm awfully sorry. I didn't mean to get so serious.

WADDLES. Let's get on with our game; there won't be time for me to get that £7 back if we don't.

DICK. Come along, Waddy,—you shall have it, if I have to revoke to give it you—wait till I get the whiskey, where the devil are the matches.

WADDLES. Hurry up.

S. MAN. You chaps drink too much. Waddles, how is it you can *not* keep your waistcoat buttoned?

WADDLES. Oh, do leave my wardrobe alone.

(DICK *retires to the pantry, laughing.*)

S. MAN. There never was a man so completely devoted to any one as Dick is to that boy.

WADDLES. Talk of love of women.

DOCTOR. If anything happened to him he's—what's that?

(*A pause, they all listen.*)

S. MAN. Some one at the front door.

(*Another pause. The door is heard to open and close softly, then another pause, then the room door opens softly and the* IMP *peers in—he is surprised at the sight of the Trinity, but smiles at them a little vasantly.*)

IMP. Hullo!

(*The Trinity glare at him in dismay.*)

S. MAN. Good God!

WADDLES. Imp, where have you been?

IMP. (*with a chuckle*) Sh—l. Spen'in' the evenin' with my fiancée.

DOCTOR. (*with a shout*) What!

S. MAN. You young idiot, where in thunder have you been?

IMP. Sh—l—it's a secret—doncher tell Dick.

WADDLES. Phyllis.

IMP. Sir Horace, I dinnot refer to Phyllis. Phyllis' sweet girl—but she's not my fiancée. Don't you tell Dick I sezzo, I'm keepin' my fiancée back for a bit. I'll s'prize you all with her some day. Now if I could get to bed. They made me drink heaps of things all mixed up together to see if I was a man now that's over. I shewed 'em I was a man—and so—now—now do you think you could put me to bed, Sir 'Orace?

(DICK *heard off.*)

S. *MAN.* Here's Dick—keep him out. I'll get the young beggar to bed.

WADDLES. Oh, Dick must never know.

DOCTOR. Quick! Man—quick! He *must* know he's come home.

S. MAN. Yes, but not *how* he's come home.

IMP. Oh, I'm so awfully unwell—don' mention this lil' matter to Dick.

DOCTOR. He's coming.

S. MAN. Lock the door.

(*He grabs the bewildered* IMP *and rushes off with him, while* WADDLES *goes to intercept* DICK. *He shuts the door and hunts for the key.*)

WADDLES. There's no key.

S. MAN. Keep him out for a minute anyhow.

(*He and* DOCTOR *exit with* IMP.)

DICK. (*pushing against door*) Hullo, what's against the door? (*a pause*) Open, one of you chaps—my hands are full.

WADDLES. Ye can't come in.

DICH. What do ye mean?

WADDLES. I won't let ye in till ye swear that for a whole year ye won't make a single rude remark about the gradual disappearance of the hair on the top of my head.

DICK. All right. I swear.

WADDLES. (*looking round in agony for the others*) Holy powers, I wonder will they be long.

DICK. Take your fat little carcas out of the way, Waddles.

WADDLES. What's that? Fat little carcas—I think you said.

DICK. Fat little carcas—fat head! Open the door.

WADDLES. Withdraw your "fat little carcas" and I will move. Apologise—apologise!

DICK. Oh, I apologise. Miles, take the little beggar away.

(*A crash of glass from outside the door.*)

Oh, damn!

WADDLES. What's that?

DICK. You blithering idiot, you've made me drop the whiskey.

WADDLES. Oh, and here's a blessed stream trickling under the door.

DICK. Lap it up—I'm soaked to the skin.

WADDLES. Oh, think of the waste of whiskey. Go, get some more, there's a pet lamb.

(DICK *retires, grumbling, as the* DOCTOR *and* SOLDIER-MAN *re-enter.*)

WADDLES. (*excitedly*) I kept him out—is he——

DOCTOR. Yes, he's in bed—Phew—what the dickens are we to do now at all—at all.

S. MAN. Dick mustn't see him till the morning.

WADDLES. Don't let him know he's home—he doesn't expect him to-night—so, it'll be all right.

DOCTOR. What the devil did he mean about his "fiancée."

WADDLES. Who can she be?

S. MAN. A bar-maid for a sovereign.

WADDLES. What'll Dick say?

S. MAN. Nothing—if he's wise. Eh! Here he comes.

(DICK *enters with the whiskey in a jug and the broken Tantalus bottle.*)

DICK. Here I am—look at me—thanks to you lunatics, I'm smelling like a preambulating public house.

DOCTOR. Good gracious—what's up wid you?

DICK. What do you mean by letting him play such tricks? You're old enough to know better—so you are, Miles—just look at the state of my trousers.

DOCTOR. Well—well. Maybe it's a blessing in dis-

guise. What wid whiskey inside and out, the prospects of the evening are improving.

WADDLES. It serves you right; how dare you be serious on my forty-seventh birthday?

S. MAN. Forty-seventh nonsense! Twenty-first—time enough to be forty-seven to-morrow morning. Here's fortune to us boys! Dickie, what's that thing of old Thackeray's you used to spout under the influence of liquor?

WADDLES. (*clapping his hands*) "In the brave days when I was twenty-one."

S. MAN. That's it.

DOCTOR. Sure, I've not heard it for years.

DICK. Here's your drink, Waddles! Good gad, I feel as if I was at school again. How did the old thing go?

(*And he recites the poem, the three fellows waving their glasses and chiming in cheerily with the refrain.*)

With pensive eyes the little room I view
Where in my youth I weathered it so long
With a wild mistress, a staunch friend or two,
And a light heart, still bursting into song.
Making a mock of Life and all its cares
Rich in the glory of my rising sun,
Lightly I vaulted up four pair of stairs,
In the brave days when I was twenty-one.

To dream long dreams of beauty, love, and power,
From founts of hope that never will out-run,
To drain all life's quintessence in an hour,
Give me the days when I was twenty-one.

(*And as he finishes he lifts his glass.*)

A toast, boys, a toast—all standing!

(*They all rise.*)

Good luck and long life to the Trinity.

WADDLES. (*fiercely*) Quadrity!

OMNES. (*raising glasses*) Quadrity!

(*They drink; as they are doing so, the door softly opens and* PHYLLIS *looks in, smiling.*)

PHYLL. (*softly*) Good-night!

(*All the men wheel round towards her and echo.*)

OMNES. Good-night!

(*There is a slight pause, no one moves and she kisses her hand; they all gravely kiss theirs to her, and she softly closes the door and disappears—there is another pause, and a half sigh escapes from all the men as they stand looking at the door.*)

DICK. (*tenderly*) Bless her. (*then, with a change of tone*) Come along. I'm sure it's my turn to deal.

(*They all go back to the card table and sit down as the*)

CURTAIN FALLS.

## ACT II.

*The same scene. Next morning.*

(DICK *and* PHYLLIS *and* MRS. ERICSON *and* WADDLES *just finishing breakfact.*)

DICK. (*passing his cup to* PHYLLIS) You're a terrible chap for late hours, Waddles.

SIR H. Only on my birthday.

DICK. What's the matter with the Imp, he's not down yet?

PHYLL. This is your third cup, Dick.

DICK. I always require four after a night with Waddles—don't I, Waddles?

(SIR H., *half buried in his tea-cup, mumbles an indistinct reply.*)

MRS. E. I hope that little bed didn't inconvenience you, Sir Horace.

SIR H. Oh, not a bit. I only rolled out once.

MRS. E. Oh, Sir Horace, I'm *so* grieved.

DICK. Not at all—his tendency to roll is not due to the size of the bed, is it Waddles?

(*The* IMP *enters, a little heavy-eyed, but with an affectation of cheerfulness.*)

IMP. Morning—morning, every one.

DICH. Hullo, boy.

OTHERS. Good morning, Imp.

IMP. I'm jolly late—so sorry. I was shaving.

SIR H. (*gravely enquiring*) I beg pardon?

IMP. (*turning to him*) Shaving—Sir Horace!

SIR H. (*as if much impressed*) Oh—I see—shaving—yes, of course, very wise—very wise.

MRS. E. (*giving him a plate*) I'm afraid the bacon is quite cold, dear.

IMP. (*with a slight shudder*) Bacon—I really don't think I can this morning.

(WADDLES *chuckles.*)

Is there any toast left?

(PHYLLIS *rings the bell.*)

Thanks, old girl.

DICK. You weren't at a birthday, Impy—you ought to be able to take your food.

SIR H. I have often found that an evening spent in peaceful, homely talk produces a disinclination for rich food in the morning. I observe my theory proved in your case this morning, Master Richard.

IMP. (*with a nervous laugh*) Do you? Could I have some more hot water?

(PHYLLIS *runs and rings.*)

Thanks, old girl.

(MAID *enters.*)

Some more toast and hot water, Dodd.

DICK. You bolted off to bed very mysteriously last night.

SIR H. Richard did as his elders bid him, like a good boy—didn't you, Richard?

IMP. Yes.

SIR H. Richard was most desirous to say good-night to you, Dick—but, on our promising that you would tuck him up when he was safely in bed—he consented to retire without your good-night kiss.

DICK. Shut up, Waddles. Phyllis, it's Friday—if you let me have your accounts and my cheque book, I'll write one out. I shan't be a minute, Waddles, old man; you're not going till the three-thirty, are you?

SIR H. (*who has never taken his eyes off the* IMP, *much to the* IMP's *discomfort*) No! Richard, don't you think a Bromo Seltzer would do you good?

DICK. Eh?

SIR H. He doesn't feel well—do you, Richard?

IMP. (*quickly, darting a furious glance at* SIR H.) Quite well, thank you.

SIR H. Dick, I think he's sickening for something. Won't somebody look at his tongue?

DICK. (*cheerily*) Anything wrong, Imp?

IMP. (*laughing*) Of course not, Dick. It's Sir Horace's joke, that's all. Wish they'd bring that toast.

PHYLL. They had to make it, you know—you're so late, I expect the fire was just made up.

DICK. (*at door*) Here's his toast. No, it's his hot water. I shan't be a moment, old man.

(DICK *goes out as the* MAID *enters with water jug.* MRS. ERICSON *goes to small work table.* SIR H. *appears absorbed in the morning paper.*)

SIR H. (*to himself*) Sh! Dear—dear—dear!

MRS. E. What's that?

SIR H. Sad—sad case! Poor young fellow!

PHYLL. (*lightly*) What happened?

SIR H. Oh, sad case. This young fellow, it appears—nice young fellow—sweet nature and all that—plenty of loving friends—happy home and all that. But weak—very weak—falls into bad hands—sits up late—drinks heaps of things all mixed up to prove that he was a man—what's the result? Proves he's only a young fool—and next morning at breakfast he's seized with a violent——

(*The* IMP *chokes into his tea-cup—and* PHYLLIS *and* SIR H. *rise hurriedly to avoid damage.*)

SIR H. (*waving the paper at him*) Damme, Sir—pull yourself together or you'll choke.

PHYLL. Well, Imp, as you don't seem to be eating any breakfast, I'll go and get the accounts for Dick.

IMP. (*through his choke*) Cut along.

MRS. E. Did you change your vest, this morning?

SIR H. (*looking up, then turning fiercely to the* IMP) Do you hear, sir—did you change your vest this morning?

IMP. Hang it all—yes, I suppose so.

MRS. E. (*almost to herself*) I'd better see those new ones must be marked— (*she gathers up her work and hurries out*)

(*Pause.* SIR H. *glares at the* IMP *a moment, then returns with a grunt to his paper. The* IMP *rises and lights a cigarette.*)

SIR H. (*not looking up*) That's mere bravado—you can't enjoy your cigarette this morning.

IMP. (*after a pause, chucks it into the grate*) I can't.

(SIR H. *grunts.*)

IMP. (*with his back to* SIR H. *and his foot on the fender, stares into the empty grate*) I say——

(SIR H., *not moving, grunts again.*)

It—it—was jolly good of you chaps not to tell Dick.

SIR H. (*shortly*) Don't call me a chap, boy.

IMP. I beg your pardon.

SIR H. And Colonel Grahame would be exceedingly annoyed if he heard himself described so familiarly by a boy of your age.

IMP. He's too good a sort to mind.

SIR H. He's no such thing.

IMP. You needn't run him down—you know he's a friend of Dick's.

SIR H. Run him down! God bless my soul. How dare you!

IMP. He's a good sort, whatever you may say.

SIR H. Whatever I—good gracious—are you aware that you're a young scamp?

IMP. I am not——

(*He lights another cigarette.*)

SIR H. You'll be sick, sir—throw it away. The Colonel has often expressed to me the deep regret with which he has noticed the growing disrespect that the young men of to-day have for their elders.

IMP. (*quietly*) I don't think any one would have occasion to say that if all our elders were like you four chaps.

(*A pause.*)

SIR H. (*completely mollified*) Give me one of your cigarettes.

(*The* IMP *hands him his case.*)

Now, then, what's all this about this woman?

IMP. (*innocently*) What woman?

SIR H. (*with scorn*) Your disreputable fiancée.

IMP. (*with an affectation of surprise*) Phyllis?

SIR H. (*jumping out of his chair*) How dare you, sir?

IMP. Isn't Phyllis my fiancée?

SIR H. She is, sir.

IMP. Then, what do you mean by calling her disreputable? I don't think it's right to speak of your friends behind their backs in the way you do.

SIR H. I do not.

IMP. You said the Colonel wasn't a good sort.

SIR H. No such thing.

IMP. And now you tell me Phyllis is disreputable.

SIR H. How dare you?

IMP. I shall have to ask you to prove your statement.

SIR H. I meant the woman you're keeping back—the one you're going to surprise us with. Tell me all about her.

IMP. (*gravely*) Really, Sir Horace—gentlemen do not discuss their little affaires de coeur with each other after breakfast—not good form.

SIR H. Good form be damned—how dare you?

IMP. Dick has always begged me to endeavour to discourage bad language among my friends—would you mind trying to check your tendency? You'll find it will get quite a hold on you, if you don't watch yourself. Even I have had to be careful.

SIR H. You're an impertinent young jackanapes.

IMP. (*slowly*) No, I'm not— (*there is a long pause*) I'm awfully miserable, that's all.

SIR H. (*insinuatingly*) Poor old Imp— (*he goes to the boy and puts his hand on his shoulder*) What's her name?

IMP. Nothing of the sort.

SIR H. Don't you think you'd better tell Dick all about it?

IMP. Not yet.

SIR H. (*very quietly*) Are you behaving quite honorably towards Phyllis?

(*A pause.*)

You had too much liquor last night, you've got a head on you. Come along, sir—we'll walk briskly down to my club, have a Brandy and Soda, and chat the whole thing over like men.

IMP. (*languidly*) I don't mind the Brandy and Soda—but, you'll have to tackle the talk.

SIR H. (*handing him clothes brush*) We'll see about that. Kindly brush me.

(*The* IMP *does as he is told.*)

And don't you ever allow yourself to fall into Dick's never sufficiently to be regretted notion that a peck or two of dust on a man's frock coat is a matter of minor importance. I was very fond of a dear dirty fellow of that sort once—but he came to no good—the dust was too heavy on him, it weighed him down. P'raps the way he whiskeyed and watered it made it a little heavier. Ready?

IMP. Yes.

SIR. H. Trot along, then, there's a good boy—we'll be back before lunch anyhow.

(*The two of them turn to go out;* SIR H. *takes the* IMP'S *arm affectionately. As they do so,* DICK *and* PHYLLIS *enter.*)

DICK. Sorry I was so long, but the Chancellor of the Exchequer was very complicated this morning.

PHYLLIS. I wasn't a bit—it's only one or two places in the adding up that I got wrong.

DICK. How the Imp and I ever paid for a single meal before you and your mother came and took us in hand, beats me. Going out, Waddles?

SIR H. Richard and I were going for a short constitutional to the club. I want to see if there are any letters; we shan't be more than twenty minutes at the outside.

DICK. The Doctor and the Soldier-Man are to be round here about 12:30.

SIR H. I know—come, Richard.

(*Exit as before.*)

DICK. (*sitting down, resignedly*) Well, I'm ready to hear the rest now.

PHYLL. It's no good making a joke of it—you know it's true.

DICK. Well, say it is. I'm living beyond my means.

PHYLL. No, you're not—we're living beyond your mea ns—look at the money you squander on me—look at the money you squander on mother—look at the money you squander on the Imp—look at his clothes, look at my clothes—then look at your own old things, it's perfectly disgraceful—and then, Colonel Grahame tells me you used to have a little shooting in Scotland, and since you've supported us you've had to give it up—so with your horse and everything else—it's all for other people —never anything for yourself.

DICK. That's where you're all wrong—it's all for myself. I'm very fond of your mother. I love the Imp—and—I (*a pause; he looks up and meets her eye*) have the greatest respect for you—so, when I see those that I'm fond of, those I love, and those I respect, all happy and contented, I puff myself up with righteous pride and wouldn't change places with the Emperor of Germany.

PHYLL. Dick why do you respect me?

DICK. (*bluntly*) I don't know.

PHYLL. It's very unkind of you, I consider. Is it because I owe everything in the world to you?

DICK. Good Lord, no!

PHYLL. Is it because I'm such a good adder up?

DICK. P'raps!

PHYLL. Or is it because the Imp has graciously consented to make me his wife?

DICK. Why do you put it that way?

PHYLL. Isn't that the proper way tc speak of his omnipotence? I'm the sort of woman who loves to bow down before her husband and beg him to put his heel upon her neck.

DICK. (*a little puzzled*) Are you really?

PHYLL. And the Imp is to be my husband, and I long for him to show his power and grind me beneath an iron heel of authority.

DICK. Oh, I don't think the Imp would ever do a thing like that. He'll be master of his own house and all that, of course, but——

PHYLL. Will he—do you really think he will?

DICK. I don't think I've considered the matter.

PHYLL. I have; the Imp and I will chat it over some day; I daresay we shall come to an understanding. I think I must try and do something that'll make you not respect me quite so much.

DICK. Eh?

PHYLL. It's an awful nuisance to be so fearfully respected—it makes one feel quite lonely, almost as if one was a marble statue out in the east wind. I should have to put up with being respected if I were a fright like the pictures of Queen Elizabeth—but as I'm only me—it's different. Couldn't you give up respecting me so fearfully? Just now and then.

DICK. I—I don't see that it's possible—but—I'll have a try if you like.

PHYLL. (*delightedly*) Will you, really? Oh do—begin now.

DICK. Well—I—er—it isn't a thing one can do all at

once, is it? You'd have to—sort of—give me a lead, you know.

PHYLL. Would I—oh, yes, I suppose that is the best way—well, suppose I do this—I put this arm round your shoulder, so— (*she is standing behind his chair*) and then I lean my cheek against the back of your head sympathetically, like this—How does that feel?

DICK. Feels as if I was going to be electrocuted.

PHYLL. Oh!

DICK. You mustn't ruffle my hair, you know, coz the Soldier-Man's coming to lunch, and—if—everybody's hair isn't smarmy, he loses his appetite.

PHYLL. Oh, bother the Colonel—let's talk about ourselves. Dick, what is the thing you wish for most in the world?

DICK. To see——

PHYLL. Don't say it— (*quickly*) I know exactly what you're going to say. (*and with a choke, she moves quickly from him and goes up to the window*)

DICK. (*a little surprised at her tone*) Do you really?

PHYLL. Yes.

DICK. What was I going to say?

PHYLL. To see me and the Imp happily married, weren't you?

DICK. Well, as a matter of fact, I was.

PHYLL. Oh, I'm so glad—it's the thing I wish for most, too—isn't it lucky that you should make all these plans for us—and we should be so pleased about it? Oh, but doesn't such happiness make one nervous—one begins to dread one's unworthiness and to feel sure that something must happen sooner or later to prevent it coming off. Oh! if anything happened to prevent this—I—think I should die—just fade away from grief—don't you, Dick?

DICK. Nothing will happen, dear!

PHYLL. Are you sure—Oh, say you're quite sure.

DICK. I'm quite sure—sure.

PHYLL. Suppose the Imp were to tire of me?

DICK. That's impossible.

PHYLL. (*snuggling up to him*) Is it, Dick—why is it?

DICK. Because—oh—because *you* are *you*, I suppose.

PHYLL. Don't you think if you were in the Imp's place you might get a little tired of me sometimes, just a little?

DICK. No—not a little.

PHYLL. Ah—but you haven't ever pictured yourself in the Imp's place.

DICK. (*softly, as if to himself*) Yes, I have often.

PHYLL. (*Rising and looking him full in the eyes*) Have you—pictured yourself married to me—oh, Dick! (*then tenderly*) Was it nice?

DICK. (*with a laugh*) Here—here—here—come along now—Finances! we've chatted enough nonsense for one morning.

PHYLL. Yes, I think we've done very well—considering.

DICK. Let's see—£473—in the current account wasn't it?

PHYLL. Yes.

DICK. (*lightly*) Then who dares to say the firm isn't flourishing?

(*A pause,* PHYLLIS *looks out at nothing in particular.*)

PHYLL. How odd it would be, wouldn't it?

DICK. (*looking up*) What?

PHYLL. What you're always picturing to yourself.

DICK. (*aghast at the notion*) You're a trying young woman to make a casual remark to. I'm always picturing myself married to all sorts of very nice people—why I've pictured myself married to your mother before now.

PHYLL. So have I—in fact, I've suggested it to mother often.

DICK. Thank you, very much. I think I shall get through these papers more quickly in my own room.

(*He rises—so does she.*)

PHYLL. I'll come with him.

DICK. (*firmly*) You'll do no such thing.

PHYLL. But I'd like to.

DICK. I don't care—you've pictured your mother as my wife——

(*Enter* MRS. ERICSON.)

So you've pictured me as your other parent, so perhaps you will go a step further and picture yourself doing what your parent tells you for once in a way.

PHYLL. Yes, papa dear.

MRS. E. Papa dear!

DICK. (*aghast*) No, no, dear lady—No—no—not at

all—merely a silly dream. Please don't consider it seriously—a dream—merely a dream. (*he dashes out*)

(MRS. E. *looks after* DICK, *then back to his door, and says hurriedly.*)

MRS. E. Phyllis!

PHYLL. (*somewhat startled by her tone*) Mother!

MRS. E. Oh my dear, I've done a dreadful thing, I know it was very wrong of me—but I couldn't help it.

PHYLL. Gracious—what have you done?

MRS. E. I found a crumpled letter in the hall—and I picked it up and smoothed it out to see who it belonged to, and, as I was smoothing it out I accidentally read a little and—and—oh it gave me such a shock that I read it all—I—I've read it twice or three times—I don't know which and oh—I really don't know what to say or think.

PHYLL. Whose letter was it?

MRS. E. It was a woman's letter—(*a pause*) to Dick.

PHYLL. To Dick?

MRS. E. Yes! he—he's making arrangements to be married, and—he doesn't want any of us to know.

PHYLL. (*slowly*) Making arrangements to be—How do you know?

MRS. E. Oh, there's quite a lot about it in the letter.

PHYLL. Arrangements to be——

(*A pause.*)

MRS. E. It will be terribly inconvenient for us—of course, he won't want us with him then.

PHYLL. Are you sure?

MRS. E. Oh, perfectly sure. I think Dick might have been more open with us—after all we've done for him.

PHYLL. What have we done for him, but sponge on him and spend his money?

MRS. E. (*helplessly waving the letter*) Oh, what am I to do with it— (*a pause*) I—I think I'll go and drop it behind the coats again.

PHYLL. No—give it to Dick—if it's his.

MRS. E. My dear, I daren't.

PHYLL. Give it to me, then—I will.

MRS. E. (*a little nervous*) I don't think you ought to read it dear—some of it is a little——

PHYLL. (*with a bitter smile*) Don't be alarmed, I don't intend to read it.

MRS. E. (*handing it to her with a parting glance at*

*it*) They really must be very much in love with each other.

(PHYLLIS *takes the letter and fights against her desire to read it—but eventually she gives way, and with a little gasp, she reads it hurriedly—then she turns her horrified gaze and meets her mother's eyes.*)

PHYLL. (*completely awed*) What sort of woman is she?

MRS. E. (*feebly*) I think she must be a foreigner. I've heard foreign ladies are frequently very fluent.

(PHYLLIS *is standing staring into space—her mother is sitting on the sofa, in an attitude of deep dejection —as* DICK *enters.*)

DICK. I told you that the Trinity are lunching with us again to—— (*he stops and looks at them both in surprise*)

(PHYLLIS, *without turning to him or looking at him, holds out the letter towards him.*)

PHYLL. You dropped this.

(*He takes it in surprise—reads it in silence, then folds it up, puts it in his pocket, and looks steadily at* PHYLLIS.)

DICK. Where did you find it?

PHYLL. Mother found it behind the coats in the hall.

DICK. Oh! (*a pause*) You have read it?

MRS. E. (*with a gulp*) I didn't mean to.

DICK. Of course not.

PHYLL. (*haughtily*) I read it because I chose to.

DICK. Yes—(*a pause*)—Well!

MRS. E. The—I'm very sorry—but this is very unexpected—I'm sure, I wish you every happiness, Mr. Carew, if you're half as good a husband as you have been a friend—your wife will be a lucky woman. (*holding out her hand to him*)

PHYLL. I hope you'll be very happy, Dick—very—very—happy. You deserve to be, only—you might have trusted me with the secret, mightn't you?

DICK. I—I wish I had.

PHYLL. Kara Glynesk. It's a pretty name—I seem to have seen it somewhere.

DICK. You may have—it's all over the walls and on most of the 'buses. She performs at the Garden Theatre.

MRS. E. (*horrified*) She performs!

DICK. You've seen the large, scarlet picture of her on the walls, there's one on the boardings opposite.

PHYLL. That woman! Oh, Dick! (*then she recovers herself*) I do hope that you'll both be very—very happy.

DICK. Oh, I expect it'll be all right. I daresay she is not as red as she's painted, you know.

MRS. E. It was a lucky thing the servants didn't find the letter.

DICK. Very.

PHYLL. Does the Imp know?

DICK. Nobody knows—but you and your mother.

MRS. E. You may rely on our discretion—at least, I can only answer for my own. We shall be seven for lunch. I had better attend to my household duties before they are transferred to abler hands than mine.

DICK. Eh?

MRS. E. The future Mrs. Carewe.

DICK. Oh, yes, of course—she will naturally expecet to er——

(MRS. E. *goes out a little stiffly.*)

PHYLL. (*stands staring at the floor, then at last she says, with an effort*) It's a terrible thing for a woman to have to acknowledge herself a failure.

DICK. What do you mean?

PHYLL. I don't think you'd understand. (*another pause, and then she laughs a little*) Fancy my having to say that of you—I couldn't have said that yesterday.

DICK. There are a great many things none of us can understand.

PHYLL. It was the dearest wish of my heart to be your true friend and—and—see how hopeless it has been.

DICK. Don't say that—oh, don't say that, you hurt me.

PHYLL. Haven't *you* hurt *me?*

DICK. How? I—I didn't mean to.

PHYLL. Of course, I'm awfully glad you're going to get married. The Imp and I have often felt that the one drawback to our complete happiness was the fact that you'd be left so lonely. Now, of course—it's all

splendid—but what hurts is that you didn't let me share your secret with you—that you didn't trust me. And all these years I've tried so hard to make you trust me—and see how miserably I have failed. (*a long pause, then she says, impulsively*) Dick—Dick—I didn't mean to be a beast—I hope you'll be awfully happy—I do, indeed—I do, indeed.

(*The hall door opens and the* Imp *and* Sir H. *reappear. The* Imp *is seen to disappear hurriedly down the outer passage, while* Sir H. *comes into the room.*)

Sir H. God bless my soul—young lady, your future husband is a most erratic young man. I take him out for a short walk, and a serious chat, to be washed down with a glass of milk—and we haven't gone a hundred yards—before he gives a gasp and makes a bolt for home, saying he'd forgotten his pocket handkerchief or something equally infantile. I—hallo! Dick, what's gone wrong with you?

Dick. Nothing, old man—come to my sanctum—we'll have a quiet smoke.

Phyll. (*aside to* Dick) Do the Trinity know?

Dick. Not a word.

Sir H. There's something in that prospect that pleases—but surely we're as well off here?

Dick. Not a bit of it. Come to my room.

(Dick *goes out.*)

Sir H. Lord—he's a masterful creature—that's the way he used to order me about 30 years ago.

Phyll. (*bitterly*) Is it?

Sir H. When he was a boy——

Phyll. Oh, I daresay he was just like other boys as now he is just like other men.

Sir H. (*puzzled*) I'm referring to Dick.

Phyll. So am I——

(Sir H. *is about to speak, when* Dick *calls him sharply, and* Sir H. *hurries out very perplexed and with his face full of concern.* Phyllis *stands motionless for a moment, then swiftly presses her hands to her temples,, and cries out.*)

I won't believe it—it isn't true. How could such a thing be true?

(*The* IMP *enters in a great state of agitation, looking hurriedly about him — she watches his movements listlessly for a moment.*)
Lost anything?

IMP. (*shortly*) No.

(*A pause. He glances round the room furtively—she watching him; suddenly a thought flashes into her face, and she gasps.*)

PHYLL. Richard—Dick! (*she springs to her feet, pointing at him*) You!—you!—Oh, you darling, you darling!

(*And, to his intense astonishment, she flings her arms round his neck and hugs him—laughing hysterically*)

IMP. Here—good gracious! Hang it all, Phyllis, don't be an ass.

PHYLL. (*half laughing, half crying*) Isn't it like him? Oh, isn't it just like him?

IMP. Like who?

PHYLL. Nobody. Imp—Imp—you're a miserable—hopeless—immoral, horrid young man—but, oh, Imp, you darling—you've made me fearfully happy.

IMP. (*gloomily*) Have I? I—I suppose I have, (*a pause*) that's the worst of it.

PHYLL. What's that?

IMP. I—er—look here, Phyllis, it's no good going on like this, is it? I—I can't stand it, you know—it keeps me awake at nights thinking of it—and goodness knows what with everything I want all the sleep I can get just now.

PHYLL. Beauty sleep?

IMP. Look here—I—that is—you and I—er—I mean it's no good beating about the bush is it?

PHYLL. I don't understand—I—Imp, what is it?—something terrible has happened, I see it in your face. Oh—Imp, don't, don't tell me anything has happened.

IMP. Well—you see it's this way. (*he stops awkwardly*)

PHYLL. (*with an assumption of terrified anticipation*) Don't say any more just yet—give me time—you're a man—be—be very gentle with me, Imp—I—I'm only a weak, loving woman.

IMP. (*with a gulp*) Well, you see—when you and I

—were engaged—we—well—we didn't know as much of the world as we do now—did we?

(*a pause, she rises and faces him.*)

(*nervously*) I say, Phyllis, don't look at a fellow like that—it's hard enough for me as it is. Goodness knows.

PHYLL. (*slowly*) What is hard enough for you as it is?

IMP. Why, to have to tell a girl that's fond of you—— (*he stops again*)

PHYLL. Don't say it, Mr. *Audaine*, I understand.

(*A long pause.*)

IMP. You—you don't think any the worse of me, do you, Phyllis?

PHYLL. I—I—somehow, I can't think at all—everything seems dark—my brain won't work—it's numb.

IMP. (*in agony*) Oh, I say, don't—there's a dear girl—I—know it must be awful for you—but—but—Oh, what could I do, Phyllis—I couldn't help myself. I fought against it, I did, indeed.

PHYLL. You—you—love—some one—else?

IMP. I—I—couldn't help it, really.

PHYLL. Tell me—everything. I—I won't faint, I can be very brave.

IMP. I will—there isn't very much to tell.

PHYLL. Who is she?

IMP. She's the most beautiful woman in the world.

PHYLL. Oh, Imp—what does beauty matter? Is she very—very good?

IMP. Er—of course, she's good.

PHYLL. Is she very—very religious—and domesticated?

IMP. I don't know about very religious or the other thing. But she's got glorious eyes. Oh, if you could only look into her eyes — you'd know how good she was then.

PHYLL. Yes, I expect I should—Imp, I will not let the world know the—the heartaches I shall have to bear, I will be very brave, you shall take mother and me to call.

IMP. Eh? Oh, would you—you see—it—it isn't quite definite just yet.

PHYLL. Doesn't she love you?

IMP. Yes, of course, that part of it's all right, but—you see, marriage is a jolly serious thing—it's for life,

you know. For good and all—and all that. So one can't only think of the love part—there are settlements and things. I shall have to settle all I've got on her, of course.

PHYLL. Does she insist on that?

IMP. She doesn't, of course—but—she's got a friend —a sort of business manager, she calls him—rather a cad of a fellow, I think—and—er——

PHYLL. *He* does.

IMP. Yes—yes—He's quite right—and all that, of course—but—I—well, I don't exactly know how much I've got to settle. I expect I'm pretty well off—but—that, of course, up to now has been Dick's affair.

PHYLL. What will Dick say?

IMP. Ah—that's it.

PHYLL. You haven't told him?

IMP. Of course, I haven't—not yet—he couldn't understand.

PHYLL. Why couldn't he?

IMP. Oh, what could a fellow like Dick know about love, and all that!

PHYLL. Ah—what, indeed?

IMP. It's awfully good of you to take it so well, Phyl—it is indeed—not one girl in a hundred would have been such a brick.

PHYLL. I feel it very deeply, Richard—but I show nothing I—I am very proud; if—if—this blow should happen to change my nature,—I—I—shall do something great—I—I'll go on the stage. My name shall be in every man's mouth, my photograph on every man's mantelpiece, my face in every shop window and my figure in full upon every wall. I've got a tendency that way, I know, because, when a week ago an old man with a long brush and a pail pasted on the boarding opposite this window a poster of a glorious creature—an ideal woman with crimson limbs and flame coloured hair, something seemed to wake up inside me, and as I watched the figure standing boldly out limb by limb against a background of gauzy drapery—I realized how narrow was life's look-out for me. How could I hope to win and keep the love of an honest man—and now it has all come true. Oh, Imp, Imp, if years ago I had cast to the winds all petticoats and prudery, I might have proved worthy of you now. But—but—as it is, I must school myself to think that all is for the best.

IMP. Well, of course, it is no good crying over spilt milk, is it, Phyl—and—and—it's awfully odd you should mention her—but—it—that's she——

PHYLL. (*looking up at him as if completely bewildered*) She— (*then in an awed whisper*) The one on the wall?

(*He nods.*)

Oh, Imp—she loves you?

IMP. Yes—it—it somehow takes my breath away when I think of it.

PHYLL. (*after a pause*) Oh, Richard, where will you be able to keep such a wonderful thing as that?

IMP. I haven't spoken to her about it yet—but I've been looking about for a flat.

PHYLL. (*with a shudder*) A flat! You couldn't—you couldn't—that would be terrible—don't you see? Can't you feel how terrible that would be?

IMP. Well—we must make a beginning somewhere—mustn't we?

PHYLL. It seems such a waste to keep her in one flat.

IMP. She—she's a good deal more homely than you'd think she is from that picture you know.

PHYLL. Ah?

(MRS. ERICSON *calls from the other room.*)

MRS. E. Phyllis, dear—you'll make the hock cup, won't you?

PHYLL. Yes, mother, I'm coming— (*then, in a whisper*) Does *she* make hock cup, Richard?

IMP. I don't know.

PHYLL. You've drunk so much of mine—but—I don't mean to reproach you, Imp, I don't, indeed—perhaps you wouldn't have if you'd known how everything was going to turn out.

IMP. (*suddenly*) Great Scott!

PHYLL. What is it?

IMP. That letter—I forgot. I must find it. I came home on purpose.

PHYLL. There was a letter picked up behind the coats in the hall.

IMP. Where is it?

PHYLL. Dick has it.

IMP. (*with horror*) Dick!

PHYLL. Does it matter?

IMP. Oh, my goodness—suppose he should read it!

PHYLL. (*loftily*) People with any sense of honour don't read other people's letters.

IMP. But—but—this was a fearfully private letter.
PHYLL. Oh, of course, that does make a difference.

(DICK *enters—a pause.*)

DICK. (*gravely to* IMP) Will you come to my study, I want to have a talk with you.
PHYLL. (*quickly seeing the* IMP'S *dismay*) He can't come now. He has something very important to do for me.
DICK. But—
PHYLL. It's very important, Dick. Go at once, Imp.
IMP. (*looking at her gratefully*) I—I must go now, Dick—I—I—won't be long.
DICK. Very well. (*he goes to the window and looks out listlessly*)

(PHYLLIS *watches him mischievously.*)

PHYLL. Is it a good likeness, Dick?
DICK. (*not understanding*) What?
PHYLL. The picture on the wall.

(DICK *catches her meaning, and with a groan pulls the blind down and leaves the window.*)

(*very gravely*) I should have thought that you were the last man in the world to fall in love with that sort of woman.
DICK. (*shortly*) Oh.
PHYLL. Yes—it only proves to me how right mother always is.
DICK. What do you mean?
PHYLL. You see, mother having been married—knows a great deal about men.
DICK. Ah!
PHYLL. And she isn't a bit surprised.
DICK. Isn't she? I'm glad.
PHYLL. No—she says the quiet, fair men are generally like that.
DICK. Like what?
PHYLL. Oh— you know—easily attracted by—by pictures on the wall.
DICK. I didn't know your mother was so observant.
PHYLL. Because you're going to be married, you needn't be rude to my mother.
DICK. I wasn't rude to your mother.

PHYLL. I think you were—you mayn't have meant it, Dick—but I think you decidedly were——

DICK. Oh, don't worry me, dear—I—I'm not in the mood to-day.

PHYLL. Poor old Dick—have you got a headache?

DICK. Yes.

PHYLL. Then I won't worry—I—I'll be very sympathetic. I—I'll let you tell me about yourself—and—and your plans for the future with your wife that is to be.

(DICK *groans a little.*)

She—she seems to be very beautiful, Dick. Is she really as beautiful as that?

DICK. I suppose so.

PHYLL. Oh, you must know. "Suppose so" sounds so cold—perhaps you don't like talking about her to me, do you mind talking about her to me, Dick?

DICK. No.

PHYLL. I wonder do you love her as much as I love the Imp?

DICK. I daresay.

PHYLL. Isn't it beautiful, being in love, Dick—doesn't it make one feel good and peaceful—and—and sunshiny. Don't you glow all over with pride and happiness every time you see that picture on the wall.

DICK. No, I don't, if you really want to know.

PHYLL. Don't you—how odd. I should love to see a picture of the Imp on the wall—that size.

DICK. Would you?

PHYLL. Yes, and every time I saw a crowd of ladies looking at it I should say to myself—look away ladies, all that belongs to me. Just how you must feel when you see everybody — even the policeman, looking at *your* future wife's picture. Do you approve of the drapery being so—so far away?

DICK. No.

PHYLL. I'm glad you don't, because I don't either.

DICK. Will you kindly be quiet? I'm not in the mood for this sort of talk.

PHYLL. Dick.

DICK. Oh, run away, there's a dear — I've lots of things to think about.

PHYLL. You've lost your temper.

DICK. I daresay I have.

PHYLL. Well, as you've lost your temper and prac-

tically told me to leave the room—I won't try to be nice to you any more.

DICK. That's a good thing.

PHYLL. Is it? And I'll tell the truth to you now. I think it's disgusting your being in love with a woman like that.

DICK. I daresay.

PHYLL. And if it had been any one I'd been really fond of——

DICK. (*rising*) If—if it had been the Imp?

PHYLL. (*proudly*) That's impossible, the Imp is engaged to me, but if it had been the Imp, even the Imp—no matter how much I loved him, I'd never have spoken to him again.

DICK. Would it break your heart never to speak to him again?

PHYLL. That's a curious question for you to ask, considering that our marriage has been almost entirely arranged by you.

DICK. (*sadly*) Yes—yes—I know.

PHYLL. I think it's rather mean to suggest to me of all people that the Imp *could* do such a thing.

DICK. I didn't.

PHYLL. I'm in error again, I suppose, or my hearing must be defective.

DICK. Oh, do leave me alone.

PHYLL. You won't be worried with me much longer. After I'm married and you're married, I don't suppose we shall see much of each other, for I don't think either the Imp or I would ever be likely to be very friendly with the red lady on the wall.

DICK. Have you done?

PHYLL. Very nearly. I don't mind telling you that now mother's worst suspicions are confirmed, it's just possible that her principles won't allow us to trespass on your hospitality much longer.

DICK. Oh, and how long has your mother had these suspicions of me, may I ask?

PHYLL. Oh, about three years.

DICK. Ever since you've been living here—eating my bread and——

PHYLL. We didn't eat much bread.

DICK. It's a pity your mother didn't realize what a bad lot I was a year or two sooner.

PHYLL. Oh, I think she did—but she often said to me—it wasn't wise to throw out dirty water before we'd got in clean. (*a pause—she says softly, thinking she*

*has gone too far*) Dick, that isn't true. She never said that.

DICK. (*wearily*) No, I don't suppose she did.

(*He is sitting listlessly, very tired, very dejected, looking at the pattern on the carpet.* PHYLLIS *goes to the door—turns and stands looking lovingly at him for a moment, then, with a little happy silent laugh, she creeps quietly to the back of his chair, throws her arms round his neck and kissing him gently, runs from the room.* DICK *looks up, startled—half rises, then sinks back again.*)

Now, what made her do a silly thing like that? (*he runs his fingers hopelessly through his hair*)

(SIR H. *comes in from the study.*)

SIR H. Isn't he about?

DICK. He's just gone out to get something for Phyl.

SIR H. It's a bit of a facer, isn't it?

DICK. On my soul, I don't quite know where to begin.

SIR H. I don't expect it's anything very serious—boys will be boys.

DICK. He is engaged to be married to the sweetest girl in England.

SIR H. Oh, I don't defend it.

DICK. (*going to the window and pulling up the blind—then again remembering the poster*) Damn the poster.

(*The bell rings.*)

There he is.

(*The* MAID *goes to the hall door and opens it.*)

DOCTOR. (*heard off*) Any one at home?

DICK. It's Terry and the Soldier-Man.

(*He goes out into the hall.*)

Morning, you fellows—You're just in time.

S. MAN. Morning, Dick—where's Waddles?

DICK. He's here—we—we're all here, you're just in time for a council of war. (*he comes down*)

DOCTOR. (*to the* S. MAN) Corporal—it's all out.

S. MAN. Council of war—good—what's the trouble, Dick?

DICK. Sit down!

(*They sit down.*)

Read this.

S. MAN. (*glancing at letter*) To you?

DICK. No, to the Imp.

(*He hands the letter to the* DOCTOR, *who reads it in silence—and gives a low whistle.*)

DOCTOR. Shall I——

DICK. (*grimly*) Pass it on.

(*The* DOCTOR *hands it to* COL. GRAHAME, *who also reads it and grunts—offers it to* WADDLES.)

SIR H. Not again, thank you.

(*The* SOLDIER-MAN *puts it on the table and there is a moment's silence.*)

DOCTOR. What sort of looking woman is she?

DICK. Judge!

(*He goes up to the window, the three men follow him and follow the direction of his pointing finger.*)

SIR H. (*gazes placidly at the poster, then murmurs to himself*) Very—very soothing.

S. MAN. The Firefly! by all that's damnable.

DICK. Is she——

S. MAN. (*answering the unspoken question*) Quite one of the most notorious.

DICK. (*facing the three silent men*) And now I shall be glad to know what we are going to do.

DOCTOR. How did you find it out?

DICK. Mrs. Ericson picked up that letter, read it, handed it on to Phyllis, who also read it and handed it on to me.

DOCTOR. To Phyllis! Good God—and she engaged to him!

S. MAN. Poor girl! What a blow for her.

DICK. That's the one slice of luck in the whole miserable business.

DOCTOR. Doesn't she care for him?

DICK. Of course, she worships him.

DOCTOR. Then where's the slice of luck?

DICK. They think the lady is in love with me.

OMNES. What!

DICK. (*taking up letter*) "Dick." I'm Dick. The Imp's Richard, too, but he's never Dick to us—he's the Imp. So I'm—thanks to that trivial misunderstanding—the future husband of that scarlet horror stuck upon the wall. However, that doesn't matter, my shoulders are broad enough to bear even that. I'm all right, it's the Imp's got to be looked after, or else he'll burn his fingers. Good God, I've rescued from danger before I—I've seen him through scarlet fever—diphtheria—all the other ills of his babyhood—this is a very similar sort of complaint, and if we can't pull him through, his father was a poor judge of guardians when he gave the boy to us. We'll talk to him—we'll open his juvenile eyes—we'll——

S. MAN. Do you suppose we'll succeed in convincing him?

(*A long pause.*) ..

DICK. (*wearily*) No. I don't suppose we shall—at first. We've got to put this thing right, ye know. We're responsible to Charlie for the boy's life and we'll take jolly good care he doesn't spoil it by this sort of thing.

S. MAN. Phyllis must be considered—wouldn't it be as well to let their marriage be broken off for the present?

DICK. Man alive, if she knew he'd—he'd turned his attention to this sort of thing, she'd never speak to him again—she's as proud as Lucifer.

SIR H. Are you sure she loves him?

DICK. Certain. I asked her just now—she was rounding on me about it—telling me how contemptible she thought it all—and—and—and I asked her what she'd have done if—if it had been the Imp—and she said that she'd give him up and hate him forever—though she knew it would break her heart.

S. MAN. Um! That does make it awkward, doesn't it?

SIR H. Well, there's fact one she loves him—now then—fact two is he doesn't love her. And fact three, they certainly ought not to be married under such conditions.

DICK. No, no—you're going all wrong. You're wrong

in saying he doesn't love her—he does in his heart of hearts. This (*pointing to the window*)—sort of thing —is—isn't pleasant, of course, but it—it's only his youth —you know. We all seem to go through it—at least so I'm told. When he finds out what it's all worth he'll sicken of it, damn quick, and then he'll marry and settle down—and—and—be the man we all want to see him.

DOCTOR. Do you think that sort of thing (*pointing to poster*) is a necessary part of a young man's education?

DICK. Certainly not, but now that he has tumbled into the water, let's pick him out and dry him as quickly as we can.

SIR H. I don't think it will do him any harm.

DOCTOR. And I'm sure it won't do him any good.

(*The door opens and the* IMP *enters quietly—he glances at the four men—closes the door behind him and comes slowly down into the room.*)

IMP. You—(*he clears his throat*) You are all very solemn—are you talking about me?

DICK. Yes.

IMP. I—I dropped a letter.

DICK. Here it is.

(*The* IMP *takes it, folds it up—and puts it in his pocket —he then strolls with affected nonchlance to the fireplace and lights a cigarette—a pause.*)

(*slowly*) I have read your letter.

IMP. (*looking at him as if greatly astonished*) *You* have read my letter?

DICK. (*gravely*) Yes.

SIR H. We've all read your letter.

IMP. Really? I always thought there were some things gentlemen did *not* do.

DICK. (*gently*) Don't let's begin like this. You know that we four would do anything in the world to help you.

IMP. Even to reading my letters. I'm grateful.

S. MAN. So you ought to be. There are damn few boy's letters I'd take the trouble to read.

IMP. I hope you all found it interesting.

DOCTOR. (*slowly*) We did that.

(*A pause—none of the Quadrity know quite how to begin—the* IMP'S *attitude has rather upset their calculations. The* IMP *blows a few rings of smoke and*

*waves them aside gracefully with his hand, then says enquiringly.*)

IMP. Well—and now?

DICK. Now we—we want you to tell us all about it.

IMP. Surely, the letter doesn't leave me much to tell.

DICK. It leaves a great deal. Come, come, old man—we've all been young 'uns in our time—let's have your version of this little love story.

IMP. There is very little to tell. I have asked Miss Glynesk——

S. MAN. The Firefly.

IMP. (*gives him a glance and continues*) I have asked Miss Glynesk to be my wife, and she has done me the honour to say all right.

SIR H. Oh, has she?

SIR H. Devil doubt her!

DICK. Yes—I—I gathered that from the letter—but—but—you see, old man—there are many things to be considered—things, that in your impetuosity you may have overlooked. Now here we are—four sober-minded, middle-aged men—whose—well, I know I'm in this speaking for myself—whose principal thought in life is to try and make things smooth for you. That's so, isn't it, you chaps?

S. MAN. Certainly.

SIR H. Quite so.

DOCTOR. It is that.

IMP. I know, of course, I know all about that, and I don't want you to think I'm a conceited young ass—but there comes a time in every man's life when his own judgment is of greater use to him than other people's.

DICK. Perhaps this is not that time.

IMP. I think it is. (*then there is a pause and the* IMP *throws his cigarette, half finished, into the fireplace*)

DICK. (*slowly*) What does your own judgment prompt you to do?

IMP. To marry the woman I love.

S. MAN. The Firefly.

DICK. She—she is a good deal older than you are—isn't she, old man?

IMP. She is a little older.

DICK. (*slowly*) And I hear—that she has seen a good deal of the world.

IMP. I believe she has travelled a great deal.

SIR H. (*chiming in*) I suppose you know that people say——

IMP. (*interrupting*) I should have thought, Sir Horace, you'd have learnt by this time to pay no attention to what "people say"—for myself, when I know a person, I form my own judgment—and—"People can say" what they please—for all I care.

DICK. You're right—you're quite right, of course—but in this instance——

IMP. (*breaking in*) Look here. I know you were all great friends of my father—and you've been jolly good to me and all that, but on this subject, I may as well tell you I shouldn't have allowed even him to interfere—it's my affair, and I've made up my mind about it.

DICK. (*gently*) You're wrong, old man—nothing in this life is ever entirely one's own affair. Nobody can ever say, I stand alone—every step you take in life, whether towards evil or towards good, reacts upon your surroundings. Now I—oh, good God! you know I don't want to preach—I couldn't, I'm not built that way—I only want you to be—well, here we are, five fellows—let's all talk this matter over, find out what's the best thing to do and make up our minds, whether we like it or not, to do it. If it's best for you to marry this lady—marry her, and good luck to you—if it's best not to marry her—don't; let's hammer it out amongst us. Your father—the dearest, bravest, truest chap that ever stepped in shoe leather—gave you into our keeping when you were so high—we swore among ourselves to make you worthy of him—and we're going to try to keep our word.

IMP. Is it making me worthy of him to try and make me break my promise to a woman?

S. MAN. (*quietly*) Which woman—which promise, you have given two.

(*The shot goes home. The* IMP *looks at him for a moment, then turns away—and leans his head against his arms on the mantelpiece, then speaks brokenly, after a pause.*)

IMP. I—you can't ask me to marry a woman I don't love—I thought I did once—but I didn't—I know that now.

S. MAN. You got engaged to her.

IMP. I—I was a fool—but—but everybody seemed to think it was all right—Dick wished it—you all wished it—and—and— (*in a low voice*) she seemed to wish it, too.

SIR H. (*jumps up, excited*) You young cad—do you——

DICK. (*restraining him*) Hush!

IMP. (*breaking in hotly*) Oh, I don't mean that she *said* so. I merely mean, everybody seemed to expect it —and—and—we drifted into it. I'm very sorry and all that, of course—but it's done, and it can't be helped.

DICK. It can be helped. Now, listen——

IMP. (*getting rather flustrated—quickly*) Oh, it's no good talking—you may just as well realize that in this matter I'll listen to no one. I know what a good friend you've been to me, Dick, and I'm grateful—but I'm no longer a boy. I'm old enough to manage my own affairs, and I intend to do it.

S. MAN. (*breaking in brightly*) Of course—we're all on the wrong tack, Dick, old fellow, we've been mounting the high horse and talking to the Imp as if he were a child. He isn't, he's a man of the world as we are—except that he's handicapped by being in love—we aren't . Now then, Imp—let's have your view of the situation as a man of the world. So it is absolutely essential to your happiness that you—er—*marry* this lady?

IMP. (*shortly*) Yes.

S. MAN. Then you must have put your case before her very clumsily.

IMP. (*fiercely*) What do you mean?

S. MAN. I don't think she has ever been approached with ceremony before.

IMP. (*starts forward furiously*) You coward!

(*All the men rise except the* SOLDIER MAN.)

D(*silencing them all with a shout*) Stop there!

IMP. (*passionately*) Don't believe it, Dick—don't believe it—it isn't true.

DICK. Hush! Hush! Let's talk it out quietly—for pity's sake.

IMP. I won't stand quietly here and hear the woman I love insulted, even by you.

S. MAN. Quite right—and if I told you certain facts concerning this lady's past, and gave you my honour that they were facts, you wouldn't believe me.

IMP. I'd know that they were lies.

S. MAN. Quite right. Now that we know where we are—I can hold my tongue.

IMP. You'd better.

(*The* SOLDIER-MAN *laughs—there is going to be another outbreak—again* DICK *checks it.*)

DICK. Stop this, I say.

IMP. Yes, I will stop this once and for all—I'll go.

DICK. Where?

IMP. To her! I'll get her to fix our wedding day once and for all.

DICK. (*springs to the door and intercepts him*) Not yet. Not yet!

IMP. You can't keep me. I'm of age—I do as I choose now.

DICK. Listen——

IMP. I've listened till I'm tired—what's the use of staying here with my hands behind my back while the woman I love is insulted?

DICK. No—no!

IMP. (*stamping*) I say yes— (*a pause, then very quietly*) Let me go, please, Dick.

DICK. (*gently*) We—we're all a little excited now, old man—when you come back——

IMP. (*slowly*) I shall not come back.

(*A pause.*)

DICK. (*looks at him and at last speaks with an effort*) You will not come back?

IMP. What's the use? I love her—nobody understands.

DICK. You—you want to go away from me?

IMP. I don't "want" to. You leave me no choice—you believe what he says— (*he points to* COL. GRAHAME *—a pause*) Don't you?

DICK. (*slowly*) Yes.

IMP. (*with a little choke*) Then wouldn't you despise me if I stayed?

(*There is a pause and* DICK *slowly moves away from the door and down towards the fireplace. The* IMP *stands irresolute for a moment, as if there was something he would like to say—but the thought fails to find expression, and he turns to go—at the door he stops and turns to* DICK *pleadingly.*)

You—you've been very good to me, Dick—I—I'm going to her—won't you wish me luck?

DICK. (*after a pause, says huskily*) I—I'm thinking of your father—if she is worthy of him—worthy of

you—then, good luck to you, Imp—good luck. (*he buries his head on his folded arms*)

IMP. (*gladly*) Thanks, Dick, thanks. I'll tell her what you say. (*and he turns and darts out, slamming the door*)

(*They all rise except* DICK.)

S. MAN. Great Scott, Dick—what do you mean by that?

DICK. God knows—the boy may be right, after all—he knows the woman—I don't.

S. MAN. (*emphatically*) I *do*—she's been the ruin of half a dozen men of my acquaintance.

DICK. No—no!

S. MAN. I tell you, yes; if the boy wants to marry her, she'll marry him—spend his money—then he who bids more will carry her off, husband or no husband. She's for sale, I tell you—for sale. To be bought as one would buy a flower.

DICK. (*starting up fiercely—striking the table with his fist*) Is she? Then, I'll buy her—I'll buy her—she's mine—she shan't belong to him and wreck his life—she shall belong to me, if the price is high—stand by me——

SIR H. Mine's yours.

DOCTOR. And mine.

S. MAN. And mine!

DICK. Good men! The Trinity sees this through.

QUICK CURTAIN.

## ACT III.

SCENE.—*A gaudily furnished room. Many photographs of The Firefly. A flaming red poster pinned to the curtains; a table, carpet on the centre of stage, and much debris about; soda water bottles and a tantalus lying on the floor—the room giving every evidence of having been the scene of a disturbance.*

(*Various lithos of* KARA *on walls and floor in her various big parts.* BABETTE, *a French maid, viciously pretty, heard expostulating in* KARA'S *room.*)

BAB. Oh, Madame, mais c'est impossible—vraiment, vraiment, c'est impossible.

KARA. (*off*) I don't care if it is—it's got to be done. Look alive now, look alive!

(BABETTE *enters.*)

BAB. Oh, I 'ate air. I ate 'air! An' she 'ave spilt de table—Oh, I say—too bad—too bad—too bad! (*picking up the things*) She 'ave crack 'im—so stoopid! so very stoopid! I 'ate air!

(*Bells rings.*)

Dat is Mistaire 'Ughie's ring. Oh, he will catch it 'ot —so 'ot! pretty quick, I tell 'im!

(*Goes up and out at back. Hall door heard to open and* HUGHIE'S *voice.*)

BABETTE. Hello, Babette, what's all the bobbery?

BAB. Oh, mon Dieu, mon Dieu, mon Dieu!

HUGHIE. (*enters*) Mon Dieu-ing ain't enlightening, Babette. I repeat, what's the bobbery? (*he looks round at the disordered room*) Hello—been havin' a bit of a beano here, ain't you?

BAB. Beano! Oh, mon Dieu! dat word is much too

little. You know quite soon—pretty dam quick. Vas Madame's brougham at ze door?

HUGHIE. Yes.

BAB. Good! (*she goes to door*) Ze carriage is waiting, Madame.

KARA. Let it wait!

BAB. (*picks up some broken china*) Look, she crack 'im in her rage. I sink she crack you, too, pretty dam quick, too.

HUGHIE. Crack me? Really that seems superfluous, considering she broke me a few years ago. Again I enquire solicitously, what is the bobbery?

BAB. (*with meaning*) I think you know.

HUGHIE. Well, if you put it like that—I think I do.

BAB. She sent for you, eh?

HUGHIE. To be sent for by the Firefly is a distinction.

BAB. This time it is an extinction, my frien'.

HUGHIE. Your English is getting quite encyclopædic.

BAB. Encyclopædic? I do not know him. Madame have sent for ze ozair damn fool, too.

HUGHIE. (*sitting up*) Wallis?

BAB. Wallis. Oui, oui, oui—oh yes. She crack 'im, too, I 'ope so.

HUGHIE. Again superfluous. Our firefly likewise broke him beyond any riveting exactly four months before she performed the same operation for me—but, tell me why this craving to jump upon the pieces now?

BAB. You know, you—you little peeg—you have played a trick on us. What was it you both tell her about zat nice little boy—ze Imp boy?

HUGHIE. Young Audaine? Oh, only a few facts about his great wealth.

BAB. (*with a squeal*) His wealth—is—oh—if you was not so infant, so young, I would like to say some sings in my own language. It was your plot—Mr. Wallis' plot—*his* plot—little damn fool! He swear he was so rich, so rich—five thousand a year to come soon. She, Madame, lose her head—she believe, and she get what you call hustle, and she have——

HUGHIE. (*springing to his feet with a shout of delight*) Not married him—don't tell me she's married him!

BAB. I tell you nozing. I leave dat to Madame—she tell you all damn quick.

(*Bell rings, and a faint cough heard.*)

Mr. Wallis! I know 'is cough—stoopid, stoopid, silly cough.

HUGHIE. (*almost to himself*) By Jove! if we've bluffed Ler into that! what a score! Jumping Jehoshaphat, what a score!

(WALLIS *enters, an immaculate youth.*)

WALLIS. Hello, Hughie! Firefly telegraphed for me to call.

HUGHIE. And for me. Wallis, my little one, she's swallowed it, hook and all, hook and all—we can call quits at last.

WALLIS. What! Has she—you don't——

HUGHIE. And our friend, the amorous youth——

WALLIS. She's not——

HUGHIE. She has—she's married him! She's married him! Christians awake! ain't there going to be a row.

BAB. Zare has been a row already. She 'ave turned 'im out of doors.

HUGHIE. Already!

BAB. Dey was married dis morning.

WALLIS. Who was present?

BAB. Only I—me—was. Oh, it is a grand secret. No one at all know, save Madame, Monsieur et moi.

HUGHIE. My word, when his people find out, won't there be a shindy!

BAB. He have not told zem yet. By Gar, I don't think he evaire tell anyone at all now—after what occur zis afternoon.

HUGHIE. You mean to say she turned him out of doors?

BAB. Ah, oui—pourquoi non?

WALLIS But her husband—whoop! wouldn't I have liked to have been present!

HUGHIE. Get on, Babette, you're slow enough to be English. Tell us what happened?

BAB. Well, zis is it. Aftaire ze ceremony, zay come home 'ere and have a little lunch—quite charming—oh, quite nice—but Monsieur 'e seem to 'ave somesing on his mind.

WALLIS. Should think he had just!

BAB. But still all vaire charming, vaire nice! After lunch zey come in here and Madame Kara smoke a cigarette—'e light it for her—vaire nice—vaire charming—zen, all of a sudden, Madame take his hand. Forgive her, she say, she very extravagant woman, and she

go to ze bureau and she take out all zese. (*pointing to letters of all sorts and conditions that are scattered about the room*)

HUGHIE. What are those?

BAB. Bills, bills, bills—all zem is damn nasty bills. Oh, I 'ate bills! And she says to Monsieur, in such a sweet, sweet way, dat he will forgive her not mentioning zem before—zey slip 'er memory—and she know he will pay zem all at once—so nice of 'im.

WALLIS. Go on—go on—this is great!

HUGHIE. What then?

BAB. Zen it was mos' surprisin'—suddenly he springs up an' zrow out 'is arms, and say wiz passion: "I 'ave deceive you, I am not rich man, only poor man rich in love. I love you, I love you, I am liar, cheat, blackguard, but I love you—all I 'ave is I love you.

HUGHIE. AND WALLIS. } And then?

(*A pause*—BABETTE *says very quietly.*)

BAB. (*quaintly*) You 'ave met Madame!

HUGHIE. AND WALLIS. } What happened?

BAB. (*softly*) Oh, a few little sings 'appen—just a few. (*she points to broken china*) I feel sorry for ze boy—ze—Oh, I mus' say I feel sorry for ze husband—she strike him full—once, twice, three times.

HUGHIE. (*quietly*) What did he do?

BAB. (*gravely*) He stand quite still—ver' white—ver' white and ver', ver still, and look at her wiz his great, sad eyes, and—and he bow his head.

(*Bell rings violently.*)

Madame's bell! I come, pretty so damn quick, I come.

(*She exits hurriedly.*)

HUGHIE. By Jove, who would have thought she'd have been fooled so easily?

WALLIS. Greed, old son, greed—they're all alike. Dangle a golden plum and they'll gollop it down and chance the indigestion—and I must say we played our cards very well. There was every excuse for her believin' the young 'un was a bally little gold mine.

HUGHIE. An' of course, when he didn't deny it, she——

WALLIS. Oh, we're brainy little fellahs, both of us—ain't we, little son?

HUGHIE. I'm brainy enough to think it wiser to (*pantomimes "getting out"*) before her ladyship has her little chat with us. You see, one must never neglect precedent, and she hit him — once, twice, three times. And I never was good in the ring. Will you——

WALLIS. Oh, let's see her—she'll be deuced waxy—and the laugh's up to us now.

HUGHIE. But the one, two, three——

WALLIS. Chance it, little son—we're both of us pretty dodgy. I wonder what she'll do about it? Married to that kid without a farthing—gad, it's a rare lark! What the devil will his people say when they hear of it! It's pretty rough on them.

HUGHIE. Yes, she isn't exactly an acquisition to a domestic circle.

(HUGHIE *has been up at back helping himself to whiskey and soda.*)

Have one? It's about the last time we'll drink with the Firefly—we ain't so popular as we were.

WALLIS. Better fortify myself for the meeting. (*he helps himself*) Heard the news about Jimmy Hirsch?

HUGHIE. Bankrupt?

WALLIS. No, on top again—cleared fourteen thou. over a Caranian deal. He'll be buzzin' around the Firefly again before you know where you are—that's my prophecy, little son.

HUGHIE. If Jimmy Hirsch has got the dibs that means good-bye to little Hubby. 'Pon my soul, I b'lieve Jimmy Hirsch is the only man Firefly ever cared a brass button for.

(*Bell rings.*)

HUGHIE. Perhaps this is the redoubtable James.

WALLIS. What'll *he* say to the marriage?

HUGHIE. That also will be interesting to observe.

(BABETTE *crosses and opens door. A handsome, rather loud voiced girl enters in ball dress.*)

BUDGIE. Isn't your mistress ready, Babette?

BAB. Not yet—not quite yet—it is only her 'air.

HUGHIE. AND WALLIS. } Hello, Budgie.

BUDGIE. Hello, you chaps, aren't you coming to Covent Garden?

HUGHIE. Later.

WALLIS. Kara has, what she is pleased to call, business with us.

(KARA *calls.*)

KARA. Babette! Babette!

BAB. I come.

HUGHIE. Oh, we must tell Budgie—it's too rich.

BUDGIE. Fire away.

HUGHIE. You know the young chap Kara met at the races—you were there.

BUDGIE. The boy who blushed if one said "Boo."

WALLIS. That's the chap—ward of a barrister, Carewe.

BUDGIE. Well, what of it?

HUGHIE. It's the rarest thing you ever heard—come here and I'll whisper. Kara married him secretly this morning, so I'm told.

BUDGIE. What!!

WALLIS. Isn't it regal? I tell you, Hughie and I deserve a medal—we spoofed her clean.

BUDGIE. Kara married him? Nonsense! He hasn't a sixpence.

HUGUIE. We know that—that's where the joke comes in. Our Firefly was led to believe that the young 'un was a bally little gold mine.

BUDGIE. (*amazed and delighted*) You don't mean to say she—oh, go on—go on—what a lark!

WALLIS. 'Course, Hughie and I are very fond of the Firefly, but well, she didn't let either of us down too gently, did she? So when she told us about this youth wantin' to marry her, we got this brilliant idea. Hughie dropped a hint about his colossal prospects, and I chimed in with a bit on my own——

HUGHIE. Then we got hold of the youth——

WALLIS. And having convinced him that she'd send him to the right—about if he hadn't £5000 a year——

HUGHIE. He apparently posed as the possessor of many but imaginary millions, sooner than get the push.

BUDGIE. By Jove, it's ripping! What a sell for Kara —won't she be sick!

HUGHIE. I think she is.

BUDGIE. (*bubbling over with suppressed delight, goes quickly to door of Kara's room and calls*) Kara, dear, I can't wait—I positively can't wait—I'll take a hansom.

KARA. All right.

BUDGIE. I must get there before she does—it's one of the best stories I've ever had a chance to tell. By-by, boys—we shall all meet later, if there's anything left of you when she's had her little say. By-by.

HUGHIE. AND WALLIS. } By-by.

HUGHIE. Sweet girl!

WALLIS. Sympathetic little soul!

(*Enter* BABETTE.)

BAB. Madame comes—en garde, Messieurs—she is very calm.

(*Exit* BABETTE *at back.*)

WALLIS. Calm!—Rather wish we hadn't stayed, don't you?

HUGHIE. She always was rather—difficult—when she calm. Wally, my son, one toast before we expire—Here's wishing all women where they ought to be.

WALLIS. Where's that?

HUGHIE. Well, I was goin' to say the bottom of the sea, but it would be such a doocid chilly process callin' on 'em.

(KARA *heard calling* "BABETTE.")

WALLIS. Buck up! She's coming.

(*They link arms and stand with their backs to the fire.* KARA *enters.*)

KARA. Oh, you're here?

WALLIS. Hello, Kara.

HUGHIE. You look beautiful, ma belle.

KARA. I want just five minutes' chat with you two boys.

WALLIS. Delighted—only too delighted!

HUGHIE. We're in luck, ain't we, old friend?

KARA. Do you know what you are—yes, the pair of you?

HUGHIE. Liars?

WALLIS. Do tell us what we've done.

KARA. You know. You think you've both been clever—you will find your joke a poor one before I've done. He has told me everything—he has nothing—nothing whatever. Oh, I don't blame him—the young fool is in love with me—lies were his only chance, but if the power is ever given me to repay you two, I'll flay you for your joke—I'll flay you! You can remember that.

HUGHIE. Such remarks make general conversation just a little difficult—don't you think, ma belle?

WALLIS. I—I—er—well, I positively don't know where to look, and that's a fact, old son.

HUGHIE. Ain't he really got any fortune, Kara?

KARA. As if you didn't know.

HUGHIE. Then, 'pon my word, it just shows how difficult it is to believe in appearances.

WALLIS. We thought he was a gold mine, didn't we?

HUGHIE. I'd have backed my boots on it—after all we'd heard.

KARA. (*looking at them with scorn*) I sent for you to tell you what I thought of you. I wanted to—but now you're here and I look at you, I wonder why I can be angry with such things as you—you're not men, or if you are, then men are such worms that I don't wonder that it's a glory to some of us to trample you underfoot.

HUGHIE. Not worms, ma belle, not worms—don't trample worms. Call us grapes, ma belle, not worms—beautiful, beautiful grapes—then crush us under your feet and give us to the world in wine—charming—quite charming. I'm in rather good form, ain't I, old son? (*he hums jovially "Oh, call us the fine Muscatel" to the tune of "They Call Me the Belle of New York."*)

(BABETTE *enters hurriedly.*)

BAB. Madame will pardon me——

KARA. What—what—what?

BAB. Madame get married in all such a hurry, she forget sings.

KARA. What's that?

BAB. Zis letter from Mr. Carewe.

HUGHIE. AND WALLIS. } Carewe!!

(KARA *is struggling angrily into pair of long gloves.*)

KARA. Carewe? Who is he?

BAB. Ze Unknown Man—ze lunatic—ze £1000.

KARA. Bah! Tear it up—who said I'd see him?

BAB. Ze letter made Madame so laugh. *Madame* said "I will see him," and he is coming to-night. I 'ad forgot. You fix the appointment. I post ze letter—but den we get married so damn quick—we forgot sings.

KARA. Send him away. I'm not in the mood to laugh at fools to-night.

BAB. He is, of course, fool. But £1000—that not so fool.

KARA. Who wants his £1000.

BAB. Madame does.

KARA. Quite right—so I do.

WALLIS. Unknown man?

HUGHIE. £1000.

WALLIS. Carewe, too. What's up?

KARA. (*fiercely*) Give me the letter. (*she snatches it and reads, then laughs*) It's preposterous! No man could be such a fool.

HUGHIE. May we know?

KARA. What's it got to do with you? (*she reads again*) £1000—what if he should mean it—it—what if it shouldn't be a joke?

BAB. I think him no joke—it read like great sense to me.

KARA. It would to a fool like you. Shall I see him?

(*A pause—again she looks at the letter.*)

What time did I say I'd see him?

BAB. Just now—it is on the strike.

KARA. Oh, is it? (*a pause, then suddenly*) I won't see him! I've had enough worry for one day. My cloak, Babette. I'm going to the ball.

BAB. Mais Madame—!

KARA. My cloak, I say.

BAB. Oh, mon Dieu, mon Dieu—!

(*She picks up cloak from chair; as she puts it on* KARA *she whispers.*)

£1000 is a £1000—Madame forgets. Suppose he mean it? Sousand pounds——

(*The outdoor bell rings.*)

He is yere!

(*A pause; they all look at each other; then suddenly* KARA *flings off her cloak.*)

KARA. Hang it all—I'll see him! Get out, you two!
HUGHIE. But, Kara——
WALLIS. Ma belle——
KARA. I'll settle our little score later; for the present —get out. I'm going to talk over a little business with this gentleman.
HUGHIE. I wonder would your husband quite approve.
KARA. (*comes to him—he moves behind chair*) Have you forgotten the old saying: "He laughs best who laughs last?" You'll both of you remember it yet. Good-night. Stop. I know nothing of this fellow. He *may* be a madman for all I know—wait there you two. If he's tame, I can manage him—if he isn't, you must—that's all.
WALLIS. (*aghast*) A madman!
HUGHIE. They have the strength of ten men.
KARA. What's his name again? (*looks at letter*) Richard Carewe—know him?
HUGHIE. Richard Carewe? (*to* W.) Do we?
WALLIS. Richard Carewe? (*to* H.) Do we?

(*A pause.*)

HUGHIE. No, we don't.
WALLIS. Never heard of him.

(KARA *talks to* BABETTE.)

WALLIS. (*to* HUGHIE) The Imp's guardian.
HUGHIE. Let's stay and see the fun.
WALLIS. Rather!
HUGHIE. What makes you think he's mad?
KARA. He has practically written and told me so. Into that room, please—you needn't come out unless I call you—into that room, please.
HUGHIE. Charmed, I'm sure, to be chucker-out.
WALLIS. Always ready to die in the cause of beauty in distress.
KARA. Thank you.—Into that room.

(*They retire into room,* L.)

KARA. (*to* BABETTE) Bring me the glass.

(BABETTE *brings her hand-glass and* KARA *arranges her hair.*)

All right.

(BABETTE *goes out, closing the door.* KARA *suddenly rises and goes to door of the room where the two men have retired, shaking her fist at it.*)

You've tricked me—you've tricked me—but you shall pay for it—you shall all pay for it—every man Jack of you!

(BABETTE *now returns with a card on tray.*)

(*takes it and reads*) Richard Carewe—what have you done with him?

BABETTE. He is in ze dining room.

KARA. Idiot! If you'd only use the little brains you've got, Babette, you would realize that I can't see Mr. Carewe through brick walls and a hall passage—bring him here.

BABETTE. Oui, Madame.

KARA. (*re-reading letter*) £1000, and he doesn't wish to see me—doesn't wish to talk to me. . . . . It's the most extraordinary proposition; I wonder what's his game?

BABETTE. (*announces*) Mr. Richard Carewe.

(DICK *enters.* KARA *rises and meets him—there is a slight pause.*)

KARA. How do you do, Mr. Carewe?

DICKN. How do you do?

(*Another pause.*)

KARA. I—I— (*laughs*) It's a little awkward ,isn't it? Won't you sit down?

DICK. (*slowly*) You got my letter?

KARA. Oh, yes, I got your letter. Do you know, I pictured you quite a different sort of man. I thought you must be a very old man. (*pause*) Are you sane?

DICK. Perfectly.

KARA. Your proposition is—odd—isn't it?

DICK. I suppose it is.

KARA. I beg your pardon—would you like a whiskey and soda?

DICK. No, thank you.

KARA. (*taking up letter*) Here's your letter. Come now—it's a joke, isn't it?

DICK. No.

DICK. No.

KARA. You really mean it?

DICK. Absolutely.

KARA. (*slowly, looking at letter*) You will give me £1000 if I will make my friends believe that you are —a—friend of mine?

DICK. Yes.

KARA. (*referring to letter*) For a month, you desire that our names shall be linked together—dear me, how comic it seems! And during that time you do not wish to speak to me—nor even to see me?

(DICK *bows his head.*)

You must be quite mad, you know?

DICK. Do you accept my offer?

KARA. Well, one can hardly accept £1000 without seriously thinking it over, can one? What does it entail?

DICK. Nothing but what is expressed in the letter.

KARA. It seems just a little too good to be true, doesn't it? You don't happen to have brought the money with you, do you?

DICK. Yes—I told you in my letter that I would.

KARA. (*rising in amazement*) Then it's real—it's *not* a joke?

DICK. Why should I joke?

æARA. Well, upon my word— (*she stares at him*) Oh, I think I see the game. You want to waken my curiosity—to arouse my interest in you?

DICK. No.

KARA. Oh, yes, you do. Well, it's an expensive way, but I'm not sure that it's a bad one. (*she laughs*) Come now—I challenge you—you won't give me your word of honour that you will never seek to improve upon the conditions of your offer? That you'll never want to change your mind about not seeing me?

DICK. I give you my word of honour now.

KARA. Well, you're quite the oddest person I have ever come across. Let me see the money—convince me it isn't a dream.

DICK. (*taking out letter*) The money is here.

KARA. It's not a cheque, is it?

DICK. No, two bank notes.

KARA. By Jove—you do mean business.

DICK. Understand, from the time you take this our compact begins.

KARA. Quite so—and it holds good for one month.

DICK. Yes.

KARA. You know you've no earthly security that I shall earn this money.

DICK. Oh, yes, I have.

KARA. What?

DICK. Your sense of honour.

KARA. Is that meant for a joke?

DICK. No.

(*A pause.*)

KARA. You're a most extraordinary person.

DICK. Is it to be a bargain?

KARA. Yes. (*she holds out her hand for the notes*)

DICK. (*gives them to her*) Thank you. I—I can go now—we have met for the first and the last time. Good-bye.

(*A pause.*)

I must ask you to forgive me for—for this insult.

KARA. I like it, believe me. It's one of the pleasantest insults I've ever experienced.

DICK. But—but there is so much at stake.

KARA. What do you mean?

DICK. I—I cannot tell you.

KARA. It really doesn't matter—the money speaks—and between you and me and the post, I wanted it rather badly. Good-bye, Protector-of-the-Poor.

DICK. Good-bye.

(*The bell rings.*)

DICK. (*turns and says hesitatingly*) Some one——

KARA. Well? Oh, you don't want to be seen here, don't you? Is that it? You do good by stealth and blush to be caught on the stairs!

(BABETTE *is heard to open the door and exclaim in surprise.*)

BAB. Monsieur!

(*A man's voice is heard.*)

HIRSCH. Back again! Is she in?

KARA. (*starts up*) Hirsch! Jim! Back again! Back again! Quick—quick! do you mind?—go in there. I—I—this gentleman—I'd rather he didn't see you. Quick—just for a minute—do you mind.

(DICK *bows and goes into the other room,* R.)

KARA. Jim!—why has he come back? Why has he come back?

(*The door opens and* HIRSH *enters. He is a heavily-built, powerful-looking man of Jewish extraction. She stands rigid—he comes slowly down—a silence.*)

HIRSCH. Well?

KARA. How dare you come back?

HIRSCH. That's foolish—you knew I'd come sooner or later, didn't you?

KARA. I—I——

HIRSCH. Kara. (*he holds out his arms*)

KARA. No, no!

HIRSCH. What do you mean?

KARA. You must go—you must go—we—we—never again! (*fiercely*) It's over—I told you! (*she stamps*) I told you once and for all, it's over. Never again!

HIRSCH. Wrong—always again—always and always—and you know it.

KARA. Oh, why have you come back?

HIRSCH. You left me eight months ago because luck turned against me.

KARA. I left you because you were sold up. I'm not good at sleeping on bare boards.

HIRSCH. Luck has turned again—you must come back.

KARA. Must!

HIRSCH. Must! You know me—when I say a thing I mean it. We will go South to-morrow.

KARA. Not to-morrow.

HIRSCH. When will you be ready?

KARA. (*taking up letter, glancing at it, then slowly tearing it up*) I have just made a contract.

HIRSCH. For how long?

KARA. One month from to-day.

HIRSCH. It is too long—break it.

KARA. No—curiously enough, it's a contract I cannot break.

HIRSCH. Strange contract.

KARA. It is.

HIRSCH. What prevents you breaking it?

KARA. (*with a laugh*) My sense of honour.

HIRSCH. Rubbish!

KARA. I thought that would amuse you—it amuses me rather.

HIRSCH. Break it.

KARA. You must be patient.

HIRSCH. I have been patient for eight months. I have stifled every thought—I have shut myself up with my dream of you, and compelled the luck to turn. It has turned. We are £14,000 to the good. When that is gone, I will be patient again—for the present, we will go South to-morrow.

KARA. I have said no.

HIRSCH. Look at me.—It isn't wise to play the fool with me.

KARA. You must wait a month.

HIRSCH. I will wait until, to-morrow.

KARA. Don't be foolish—you bore me.

HIRSCH. It's no contract—it's a man.

(*Enter* IMP.)

KARA. What if it is—that's my affair!

HIRSCH. You dare!

KARA. My dear Jimmy, you're not the only man in the world, you know.

HIRSCH. Who is he?

KARA. You wouldn't know him.

HIRSCH. Who is he?

KARA. If you really wish to know, his name is Richard Carewe. (*she calls*) Mr. Carewe.

HIRSCH. (*starting forward fiercely*) He's there!—you love him.

(DICK *enters.*)

KARA. (*with a defiant laugh*) What if I do?

HIRSCH. (*throwing over the table*) You devil!

KARA. Help me! (*she backs to the sideboard*)

(HIRSCH *springs towards her with uplifted hand; simultaneously the* IMP *rushes down to stop him. Then* DICK, *by a quick movement, intercepts and seizes the boy.*

IMP. Keep back!
DICK. (*holding him*) Go home. This is my quarrel.

KARA *moves down* R.

You heard what she said. She's *mine*.
IMP. (*facing him in a blaze of anger*) Liar! She's my wife!

(*There is a long silence.* HUGHIE, WALLIS *and* BABETTE *have entered.* DICK *turns slowly to* KARA.

DICK. Is this true?
KARA. Yes.
IMP. (*in a voice shaken by passion, and still facing* DICK) Tell them you have lied.
DICK. (*very slowly*) I've lied—I beg your pardon.

(*Another long, tense silence, broken by a light laugh from* KARA.)

IMP. (*turns to her, imploringly*) Kara!

KARA. (*coldly*) Have you forgotten what I said to you to-day?

(*There is a pause, and, as the* IMP *sinks back heart-broken upon the sofa, she flings back her head haughtily and sweeps to the door, saying loudly.*)

KARA. My cloak, Babette. Show these gentlemen out. Jimmy, take me to my carriage. I will explain.

(HIRSCH *laughs, and she sweeps out of the room on his arm. The hall door shuts with a bang.*)

DICK. (*holding out his arms, pleadingly*) My boy, my boy!
IMP. (*facing him, says slowly and quietly*) Never again—you've killed it!

(*He turns from him and goes out of the house.* DICK *stands for a moment, motionless, heart-broken; then he repeats in a whisper, mechancially.*)

DICK. You've killed it! Why, since he was so high, I've—— Never again—he doesn't mean it—he—he can't mean it.

BAB. (*comes to him with his hat and cloak*) For Monsieur.

DICK. (*looks at her dazed, then realizes*) Yes—I forgot—Oh, yes. He didn't mean it. I—I will go after him—he didn't mean it—he didn't mean it!

(*He goes slowly out after the boy.* WALLIS *and* HUGHIE *turn to each other and lift their glasses meaningly.*)

HUGHIE. Chin-chin, old son! Quite a busy evening!

CURTAIN.

## ACT IV.

TIME.—*The same night—about an hour later.*

SCENE.—DICK'S *room in the Clement's Inn.* MRS. ERICSON *dozing in an easy chair*—PHYLLIS *working by her side. After a slight pause, she rises and goes to the window—draws the curtains a little and looks out.*

MRS. E. *sits up with a start*) I must have dozed, it must be very late.

PHYLL. Very late.

MRS. E. Oh, my dear—we can't sit up any more.

PHYLL. We must—he can't be much longer now, at least—you needn't, mother, dear—I must.

MRS. E. Well, anyhow if I do sit up, I'll do it lying down in my room, this low chair gives me cricks in my neck.

PHYLL. It'll be an awful blow to him.

MRS. E. Yes, dear, I'm afraid it will. What it is about young men that makes them go off and get married like that, I don't know. Are you going to stay here, or are you coming with me?

PHYLL. I'll stay here.

MRS. E. I couldn't keep my eyes open sitting up, perhaps it'll be better lying down. Oh, do lie down, too, dear, you look worn out.

PHYLL. I'm all right. We must be very kind to him when he comes, mother.

MRS. E. Yes, we will be—if I can keep awake.

(MRS. ERICSON *goes sleepily to her room—leaving* PHYLLIS *at the window.*)

PHYLL. Oh, what can it be that keeps him!

(*Footsteps heard outside—then the electric bell rings.*)

Here they are! (*she runs to hall door and opens it*)

(SIR HORACE, *the* DOCTOR *and* COL. GRAEME *come in.*)

Where's Dick?

WADDLES. Isn't he here?

COL. We thought he was here.

PHYLL. Hasn't he been with you?

COL. Yes!

PHYLL. (*looking from one to the other—observing their embarrassment*) What's happened?

(*They don't answer.*)

He had a letter from that woman this afternoon. I recognized the writing on the envelope. Are they married?

COL. Who?

PHYLL. The Imp and she.

(*The three look greatly surprised.*)

COL. You know—how did you know?

PHYLL. I knew days ago. The Imp told me—and—and—I got this letter this afternoon, saying that by the time I received it he'd be a married man.

WADDLES. Oh, why didn't you tell Dick?

PHYLL. I'd promised not to. He wanted to tell Dick himself. Besides, Dick must have known, because he got a note from the Imp's wife this afternoon.

COL. But unfortunately the note did not say a word about the marriage.

PHYLL. (*amazed*) Didn't say—I don't understand that. Would you mind telling me what's happened? I'm quite old enough to be told things. I'm not breaking my heart for the Imp. I gave him his freedom very willingly. Tell me — Dick is suffering, I know that. He's keeping everything from me. I want to help him —I must help him—tell me what's happened.

COL. I think we'd better.

DOCTOR. Ah, shure—I'm glad you're not breakin' your heart for the boy.

PHYLL. So am I. Tell me about Dick, please.

COL. Well—this lady that the Imp has married——

DOCTOR. Wasn't a desirable party at all—at all.

COL. And so Dick went to-night by appointment to —to buy her off.

PHYLL. Too late?

WADDLES. Too late.

DOCTOR. That's just the devil of it.

COL. And—and—the Imp and Dick have—well—they

haven't exactly quarreled—but the boy knows now that his marriage has been a mistake.

PHYLL. Already?

COL. I think the lady has transferred her affections to some one else.

PHYLL. But she only got married to-day.

WADDLES. Some ladies are a little fickle, Phyllis dear.

PHYLL. Something awful must have happened.

*The three men nod.*)

(*in a whisper*) What?

COL. We don't know—yet.

PHYLL. Oh, Dick—poor Dick!

WADDLES. If you'd seen him walk out of that place to-night, you'd have said poor Dick, indeed.

COL. You see Dick, knowing nothing of the marriage, proved to the boy—that the woman wasn't fit to be any man's wife.

DOCTOR. And all the time the two were married.

(*There is a long, disconsolate pause.*)

PHYLL. Where is he now—somewhere out there alone with it all. Oh, dear, oh, dear! (*she goes to the window and leaning against the curtains she has one quiet little sob all to herself*)

(*The three men look at each other—then the* DOCTOR *says in a whisper.*)

DOCTOR. It's Dick she loves, after all.

(*The other two look at his incredulously for a moment, then, as the idea takes root—the* COL. *gives a low whistle.*)

WADDLES. (*gasps*) You're right, you're right. Oh, what fools we've been!

DOCTOR. We've found the silver lining, boys, there'll be a new member in the firm.

COL. But, does Dick——

DOCTOR. (*breaking in with a smile*) Av course he does—shure, don't we all?

(*The three men draw a long breath and turn and look gently at the girl—she is still standing staring out into the night waiting for* DICK *to come.*)

(*tenderly*) When he comes in, ye'll try and comfort him—won't you, my dear?

PHYLL. Oh, if only I could.

SIR H. He'll be very lonely, Phyl.

DOCTOR. Ah, if there was only some sweet woman who loved him—who could take his tired head upon her heart and tell him not to grieve—that 'ud do him good, I'm thinkin'.

WADDLES. (*abruptly*) Is your mother up?

DOCTOR. (*rounds on him*) Ah, shure—what's the good of that?

WADDLES. My gracious, I didn't mean that. I was only thinking.

PHYLL. (*coming away from the window wearily*) It's very late, if you'd like anything to eat and drink—it's all on the table in the dining room.

WADDLES. That's what I meant, man, when I said——

PHYLL. (*suddenly listening*) Hush! (*a pause*) He's coming.

(*She goes up to door and listens.*)

DOCTOR. What did I tell you! She knows his step. Boys! I'm thinkin' this blow is the softest thing Masther Dick has ever sthruck.

PHYLL. Shall—shall we go into the dining room?

DOCTOR. (*a little astonished*) For why?

PHYLL. Perhaps he—he might like to be alone to-night—just to-night.

WADDLES. Well, I think p'raps four of us is too many, but—maybe—one.

DOCTOR.
AND
COLONEL.
Yes, yes!

(*They move hurriedly out.*)

WADDLES. (*to* PHYLLIS) You stay!

(*He goes out after the other two. The outer door is opened with a latch-key and* DICK *comes in wearily—he passes across the hall and into his own room. Throws his hat and coat on to a chair and stands for a moment lost in his thoughts. He doesn't see* PHYLLIS, *who is in an alcove of the window. After a bit, he goes to the desk, unlocks it, takes out the letter—*

*and reads it through, then holding it tenderly, as if it were a living thing—he whispers.)*

DICK. I did my best, old man, I did my best.

(PHYLLIS *comes in quietly—closing the door after her. She steals across to him and puts her hand tenderly on his shoulder.)*

Aren't you in bed?

PHYLL. No, dear.

DICK. You should be child, it's late.

PHYLL. Is it? (*then, with great tenderness, she slips her hand into his*) Oh, Dick, dear, you look so tired.

DICK. Do I?

PHYLL. You're not angry because I waited up? I knew you'd be tired, and I—I thought you might be lonely. So—so—I wanted to be with you, if you'd let me. I know about it all, Dick—the marriage—and—the rest.

DICK. You know?

PHYLL. The Trinity told me.

DICK. (*a great pity comes over him for her*) I did it for the best, dear. I'm very sorry.

PHYLL. Don't be sorry for me, Dick. He told me days ago about her, and I was glad he didn't love me—because—I didn't love him either.

DICK. You didn't?

PHYLL. No! Where is he?

DICK. I don't know. (*then, with a long, indrawn sob, he sinks into the chair by the table and buries his head on his hands*) Ih, my boy—my boy!

PHYLL. Oh, don't, Dick, don't.

DICK. I tried my best to save him, I did, indeed.

PHYLL. I know you did, he knows you did.

DICK. He doesn't, he hates me—how can he help it, he hates me—oh, my boy, my boy!

PHYLL. Dick!

DICK. (*rising and moving from her*) Don't, dear, please don't. Leave me alone, I—I'd sooner be alone, just now.

(*And* PHYLLIS, *understanding, goes quietly away. He has moved towards the mantelpiece and bowed his head, there is a long silence, he stands there alone in his grief.*)

Be father—mother—all to him—and this is what I've done!

(*The hall door is heard to open and shut again softly,* DICK *is heedless of it, then the door of his room opens and the* IMP *comes in.* DICK, *at the sound, looks up and sees him. There is a pause.*)

DICK. (*gently*) You have come back?

IMP. (*with a laugh*) Are you surprised?

DICK. Yes.

IMP. (*bitterly*) When a man arranges to lie away a woman's reputation to her husband, he shouldn't be surprised if the husband has a word to say on the subject.

(DICK *looks at him, then says slowly.*)

DICK. I knew nothing of the marriage. What I did, I did for your sake.

IMP. Thank you very much.

DICK. I don't think you were wise to come here to-night—we—we can't see things clearly yet. You'd better go; come back to-morrow, perhaps then you will be able to understand.

IMP. Oh, I quite understand now. I've learnt my lesson pretty thoroughly, thanks to you all. A woman, even, a man's wife, is a thing to be bought and sold. If you've taught me nothing else, Dick, you've taught me that.

DICK. I've never taught you anything that wasn't true. No woman worthy of the name is to be bought.

IMP. Ah, I know 'em now—you don't. Who was the chap who said every woman was at heart a wrong 'un? He knew life. It's only the accident of birth and circumstances. Why, I daresay Phyllis——

DICK. (*sternly*) Stop there! (*then very quietly*) You'd better go, we are neither of us in a fit state to talk this matter over. We'd say what we didn't mean, and—and I might get angry with you. (*a pause*) I have asked your pardon for my share in this; at the same time, I must ask you to remember that I did what I thought was right.

IMP. Our views of right and wrong differ.

DICK. (*gently*) They may to-night. I'm sure they won't to-morrow. (*he goes to the door and opens it*)

IMP. (*hotly*) I'm not going yet. There's a good deal I've got to say to you.

DICK. And a good deal I've got to say to you, but not to-night.

IMP. (*raising his voice*) I will——

DICK. Hush! I said not to-night.

IMP. (*stamping*) I will know the truth of this damned conspiracy against me.

DICK. Stop!

IMP. It has been a conspiracy, and you know it. What were you all at the club for?

DICK. (*quietly*) I shall expect you in the morning.

IMP. (*getting beyond himself, faces* DICK *in a rage*) Tell me now.

DICK. I shall expect you in the morning.

IMP. (*lifting his hand to strike*) You—you——

(DICK *seizes his arm and holds him for an instant as in a vice, then lets him go, and says gently.*)

DICK. That would have been a pity, wouldn't it?

(*A long pause, then he takes the letter.*)

This is your father's letter to me, written when he lay dying, and you were a little child; in it he asks me to try and take his place. I have tried—you are of age now—you need me no longer. (*and he tears the letter into two pieces*)

(*The* IMP *is sitting upon the sofa, his head buried in his hands. A knock is heard at the outside door.*)

Who's that?

(DICK *goes and opens the door. A* CABMAN *is seen outside.*)

CABMAN. (*enquiringly*) Richard Carewe?

DICK. Yes.

CABMAN. Lady told me to deliver this note, most spechul.

(DICK *takes it and fumbles in his pockets for a coin, hasn't got one. He turns to the* IMP.)

DICK. Got a couple of shillings?

IMP. Yes.

(*He hands* DICK *the coins, who, in his turn, hands them*

*to the* CABMAN, *who disappears, saying "Thank ye, sir."* DICK *closes the door and comes down to fireplace, opening the letter as he comes. He reads a little, then looks up at the* IMP, *who rises quickly, guessing intuitively.*)

IMP. It's from her.

DICK. Yes.

IMP. You can read it out. I'm not afraid—she can't write harder things than she said.

DICK. "I have learnt from Mr. Hirsch that you are the young man's guardian, so I see now the reason of our compact. I am sorry you were too late, for his, for my own, and for your sake. However, don't worry, your young friend will have no difficulty in obtaining his freedom. I return your cheque for two reasons; one is, I'm sure Hirsch wouldn't approve of my receiving such a present even from my husband's guardian, the other is I don't want you to think you are the only fool in the world. I'll send you some roses from Monte Carlo."

(*A pause, he looks at the* IMP, *who laughs and goes up into the window, where he stands staring into the darkness. Then he speaks without turning.*)

IMP. When I told her that I should kill him, she laughed and said, "Very well; but when you are hanged, there'll be nobody left to deal with his successors"; that seemed logical, so I came away and left him to eat his supper.

DICK. (*amazed*) You saw them?

IMP. (*nods*) Just left 'em—they're together now.

DICK. (*going quickly to him*) Oh, my poor old boy.

IMP. I—I can't help laughing. My position is so very ridiculous. (*he rises wearily*) I—I'll go now.

DICK. Where are you staying?

IMP. Metropole. Good-night.

DICK. Good-night.

(*The* IMP *goes slowly to the door, then turns to* DICK *and says huskily.*)

IMP. You—you might ask me to stay here.

DICK. (*gladly*) Would you?

IMP. Oh, Dick! (*and he breaks down utterly as* DICK, *deeply moved, catches him in his arms*)

DICK. (*half laughing, half sobbing*) Come, come,

it'll all dry straight, we will work it through together, old man, shoulder to shoulder, as we used to be.

IMP. All that I've said, just now, I didn't mean it, I didn't, indeed. I've been a brute to you, Dick, but I didn't mean to be.

DICK. I know, old man—bless you, I know. You had to work it off on somebody, and I was nearest.

IMP. (*passionately*) Dick—Dick! I'd like to get out of this country, just a bit. I must, I must—can't I go? There's always a war somewhere—I'd like to fight.

DICK. Why not? Get along out and show 'em you're your father's boy, our boy. Then come back all over Victoria crosses and things, and—and the Trinity shall entertain you at a banquet. That's right, boy, buck up. The world's a damned hard fight, you've had the first knock, a stiff 'un, right under the jaw, but you're up again, old son, and the fight is yours to win, if you only choose.

IMP. I choose.

(*And* DICK *wrings his outstretched hand.*)

DICK. (*cheerily*) Good man! Get along to bed, old son, you're dog tired, we'll think of the future in the morning

(*And the* IMP *goes out.*)

DICK. He's true grit, every inch of him. (*then suddenly*) Here, here, I tore up his father's letter. I was a fool. (*he picks up one piece*) It's all right, Charlie, old man, I'll be able to face you yet. (*he picks up the other piece*) Come here. Come here! Get back into your place—I've been a fool!

(*And he puts the torn pieces back into his drawer as* PHYLLIS *comes in.*)

PHYLL. (*comes in quickly*) He's back. I heard him go into his room.

DICK. Yes, he's back.

PHYLL. Poor old Imp.

DICK. Thank goodness he's got the pluck to take it like this. God knows it may be for the best after all. (*then he turns and looks at* PHYLLIS) Hullo! why—why—why—I can't have my little girl looking like this

—black shadows under her eyes, this won't do—you're the tired one now.

PHYLL. (*smiling sadly*) No, I'm not. I'm only tired for you. I know how you must feel about all this, and somehow I don't seem to be able to help you a bit.

DICK. (*stroking her hair softly*) Yes, you do, dear, you help me all the time.

PHYLL. (*moving a little from him*) Oh, I wish I could think I did. But (*cheerfully*) it's all right. The Imp's come back. And the Trinity is in the dining room having whiskies and sodas, so as you've got all you want, you'd like to go to bed.

DICK. No, I shouldn't, but it's getting very late.

(PHYLLIS *turns on her heel and goes to the door.*)

(*he calls her*) Phyllis, it—it was very sweet of you to wait up for me, dear. Good-night.

PHYLL. Good-night.

(*She again goes to the door—again he calls her softly.*)

DICK. Phyllis!

PHYLL. (*turning*) What? (*a pause*)

DICK. Nothing, I—I think you'd better go to bed, dear.

PHYLL. You were going to say something.

DICK. No, no——

(*She turns away—he stands watching her, then says quickly.*)

You're quite sure you never— (*he stops, there is a pause—she looks at him and then away*)

PHYLL. I was never in love with him, if that's what you mean.

DICK. You never were—really? (*gladly*)

PHYLL. Never was, really—really.

DICK. (*after a pause*) Ah, well, it's only postponing the evil day. He's gone—you'll be the next to go, but you've been fairly happy while you've been here, haven't you, dear?

PHYLL. I've been very happy, Dick.

DICK. (*with a gasp*) I wonder— (*he stops again*)

PHYLL. (*coming a little nearer to him*) What do you wonder?

DICK. (*backing a little*) Nothing. You really ought to go to bed, dear.

PHYLL. I'm going.

DICK. I suppose what you said the other day about your mother—well, I suppose you'll be going altogether soon.

PHYLL. (*gravely*) I don't think I was quite just about mother the other day—she didn't say those things, really.

DICK. Didn't she? Then, why——

PHYLL. (*slowly*) Oh, because I was in a silly mood —you would keep on saying things to me about the Imp and how happy I ought to be, and all that, and of course I wasn't a bit happy. I'm much hapier now.

DICK. Now?

PHYLL. Well, because now he's not going to marry me, so I needn't marry him. I'm free now, Dick.

DICK. Oh, I wish I was ten years younger.

PHYLL. I don't.

DICK. (*eagerly*) Don't you? (*he moves to her*) Oh, Phyllis!

(*She meets his eye and he backs off again.*)

You really ought to go to bed, dear, it's quite late.

PKYLL. Does it matter for once?

DICK. (*gathering courage*) Phyllis, I—I—oh, I'm a fool, don't laugh at me.

PHYLL. I haven't.

DICK. I—I—oh, Phyllis, I've never dared to tell anyone. I've never dared to tell myself—much less you.

(*A pause.*)

PHYLL. What, Dick?

DICK. That—that—oh, my dear, it's striking two—what would your mother say?

PHYLL. (*very matter of factly*) You're quite right, Dick, dear, it is very late. Good-night. The Trinity are in the dining room, I'm keeping you from them. Good-night.

(*She goes to door.*)

DICK. Don't go just yet.

(*She comes back.*)

DICK. I'm not usually such a fool—but somehow this seems so fearfully serious. I—I—you're a young girl.

I'm forty. It isn't fair, is it? I mean, I daresay, you would out of the kindness of your heart, but—but—No, I'm a fool, everything's better as it is. Good-night, dear.

(*He turns from her and goes to the table—she stands looking at him for a moment, then says softly.*)

PHYLL. You don't mean to say good-night, Dick, like that. Good-night. (*she comes to him with her hands outstretched—their eyes meet, the touch of her hands conquers him*)

DICK. I must tell you— (*a long pause, and he says in a whisper almost*) I love you!

PHYLL. (*simply*) I love you, too, Dick.

DICK. You love me!

PHYLL. I've always loved you, but you didn't seem to care.

DICK. (*dazed*) You love me!

PHYLL. I love you.

(*There is a silence, and then he kisses her—there is another silence—then he says with a long sigh.*)

DICK. I thought everything had ended. Everything is just beginning—You love me—say it again.

PHYLL. Need I?

DICK. Yes, say it again.

PHYLL. I love you.

DICK. You love me.

(*A long pause—he kisses her—and whispers.*)

Again!

PHYLL. Again and always, I love you.

DICK. Then what's the matter with anything?

PHYLL. Nothing.

DICK. (*in a hushed whisper*) Nobody must ever know.

PHYLL. Why not?

DICK. I don't know—but—but—oh, they mustn't—say it again.

PHYLL. Tell everybody—are you ashamed of me?

DICK. Ashamed! Here—hi! No, no, before they come, say it again—just in a whisper. I love you, of it's the most beautiful thing I've ever heard. Phyllis, Phyllis, where have I been hiding myself all these years? you've opened out life to me.

PHYLL. (*whispers*) I love you.

DICK. But—but oh, I'm forty, dear.
PHYLL. I love you.
DICK. I'm—I'm an old bachelor.
PHYLL. I love you.
DICK. (*with a cry of delight*) Don't whisper it, shout it. We love eacvh other, and we're going to be married. Let's tell 'em, let's tell 'em. Waddles, Miles, Doctor—what are they doing? How shall I tell 'em?
PHYLL. It's very easy.
DICK. (*ruefully*) Is it? Here, I've called 'em, you tell 'em—that's fair.

(WADDLES, *the* DOCTOR, *and the* SOLDIER-MAN *enter hurriedly.*)

THE THREE. Old man——
DICK. The Imp's come home—and—and we're none of us to worry, because he's going to be a man.
THE THREE. Oh! (*vaguely*)
DICK. And—and—Phyllis has got something to say to you.

(*The three men, with instant comprehension, wheel round to* PHYLLIS.)

COLONEL. (*eagerly*) Is it all right?
PHYLL. (*smiling*) Yes.
COLONEL. Oh, my dear! (*and he takes her hands and kisses her fervently*) It's our right.

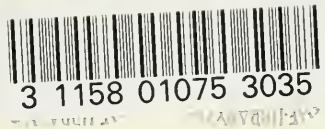
(*He hands her to the* DOCTOR, *who does the same and hands her to* WADDLES, *who follows suit.*)

THE THREE. Good luck to you—it—it—it's splendid.
DICK. (*taking her*) Yes, isn't it? Splendid.
OMNES. Kiss her, kiss her!
DICK. I'm not afraid. I—I did it all by myself just now.

(*He kisses her.*)

WADDLES. Thank goodness, it isn't a quadrity any longer—it's a quantity.
OMNES. It is—it is!
WADDLES. With a power to increase our number.

CURTAIN.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